MEDWAY AGRICULTURE RESEARCH PROJECT

FWAG Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group

Kent & Sussex FWAG

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Contents

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Greening the Gateway
KENT AND MEDWAY

SUMMARY

The project is an initiative from Medway and Gravesham Borough Councils, supported by Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway. The objective of project was to build a picture of agriculture in the study area and how Local Authorities and local initiatives can apply this to projects in an incentive, planning and development context.

The study area covers the non-developed areas of Medway, in the rural and the rural-urban fringe locations on the Hoo Peninsula, in the Medway Valley, and areas to the south and east of the built up parts of Medway around Capstone and Rainham. It also includes eastern areas in Gravesham borough in Higham and Shorne.

Background information was researched on farming in the area and at county, regional and national/EU level (by desk based and telephone research). Data for Medway and the Gravesham districts from the June 2007 Agricultural and Horticultural Survey is used. Agricultural support and economics are examined, including trends and sector differences. Recent developments are summarized such as impact of livestock diseases, regulation and climate change. The policy and incentive framework for farming is presented, and market led opportunities. Designations and agri-environment schemes are examined.

Many of the factors that influence farming in the study area are not local. They come from EU policies, nationally derived incentive and regulatory schemes, and worldwide factors such as food distribution and demand. Nonetheless the study area has a distinctive agricultural landscape and many local characteristics which set it apart.

The attitude of farmers in the study area was surveyed (by means of a farmer meeting, a questionnaire and individual interviews). 18 farmers attended the meeting and representatives from Medway and Gravesham Borough Councils. Speaker presentations highlighted environmental and diversification opportunities for farm businesses in the area. A participative discussion aimed to bring out issues that affect farm businesses, the future of farming, and engagement with plans and policies in the area. The farmer questionnaire was sent with the invitation to farmer meeting. From the responders to the questionnaire, four individuals were asked to take part in follow up interviews, and the local NFU was also interviewed.

There is a strong perception among responders and those interviewed of a special area for farming. The majority are very or quite confident in the future of farming, and the majority planning to increase enterprises. The main issues seen as affecting the future of farm businesses are the future of the CAP, food production vs. environment or non food crops, regulation and 'red tape'. The power of the supermarkets is also a concern.

The issues emerging from the information and attitude studies are summarized, with reference to local studies and strategies, and further information needs.

Proposals are put forward as example practical actions likely to get farmer engagement, aimed at a wide range of local issues, and involving many other agencies.

Kent & Sussex FWAG 13/02/2010

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Farming is now a fast changing world. Even in the period of this study, two developments have taken place which could profoundly affect agriculture and horticulture in the area.

In January the government launched its strategy for food production in Britain, Food 2030. The stated aim of the strategy is to produce food in ways which:

- use global natural resources sustainably,
- enable the continuing provision of the benefits and services that a healthy natural environment provides,
- promote high standards of animal health and welfare,
- protect food safety,
- make a significant contribution to rural communities, and
- allow us to show global leadership on food sustainability

While an aspiration at this stage, Food 2030 has been hailed by the industry as a signal of political support for farming, and in favour of its role in food production.
http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/strategy/

In the same month, the Government gave the go-ahead for a 'supermarket ombudsman'. The creation of an enforcement body is in line with the Competition Commission's recommendation for a body to enforce the Groceries Supply Code of Practice (GSCOP). The Code of Practice comes into force in February and will be followed by a consultation on how best to enforce the GSCOP, including which body that might be and the powers it could have.

Many growers in the study area supply to supermarkets and this has a marked influence on farm land use and economics, as well farmer opinion.
http://www.hortweek.com/news/977358/Government-gives-green-light-supermarket-ombudsman/

1.2 Background to study

The study was initiated by Medway and Gravesham Borough Councils, and Greening the Gateway Medway and Kent. The purpose of the project was to collate information on agriculture in the study area to:

- Provide a better evidence base and knowledge of agriculture in area.

- Inform green infrastructure planning work – including assessing the ability to deliver access, landscape, heritage, biodiversity, and natural resource management aims through HLS and other measures.

- Inform local authority planning officers of likely changes/issues regarding land use and especially diversification.

- Provide a basis for further engagement with farmers and land managers in promoting funding, rural advice and other development opportunities, eg Leader, Countryside Management Project and in understanding the barriers land managers face in accessing funding and advice.

1.3 Approach to study

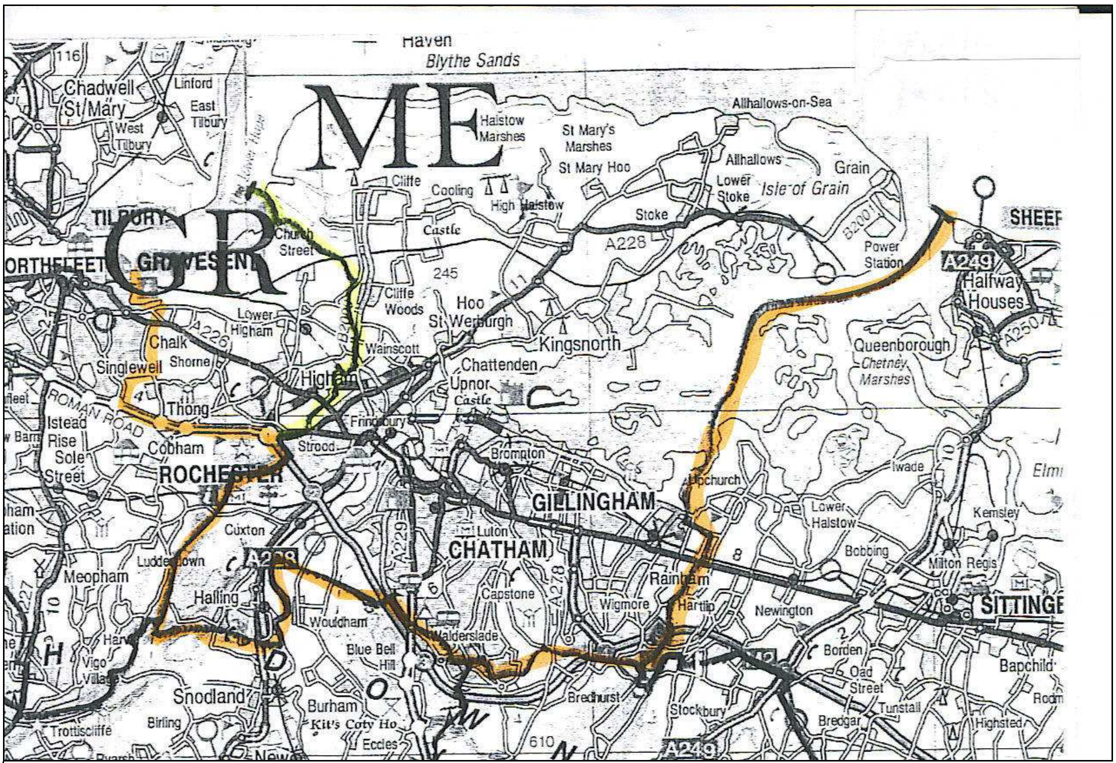
The strategy adopted was to research background information on farming in the area and at county, regional and national/EU level (by desk based and telephone research), and the attitude of farmers in it (by means of a farmer meeting, a questionnaire and individual interviews). In this, the project sought answers to the following questions;

Information study;
What are the main farming – and farmer – types in the study area?
How typical of the regional / Kent picture is the study area?
Who owns land in the study area?
How do land designations affect farmers?
What incentives for land management are available to farmers?
What constraints do farmers operate under?
How much land is in agri-environment schemes?
What kind of land is not in environmental schemes?

Attitude study;
How confident are farmers and what drives this?
How important are national issues cf. local ones?
What changes are farmers likely to make to their current enterprises?
What do farmers think will drive their businesses in the future?
What stops farmers going into agri-environment and rural development schemes?
Are farmers aware of local policies and does it matter?
How do LA's best engage with farmers for their views?

1.4 General description of study area

The study area covers the non-developed areas of Medway, in the rural and the rural-urban fringe locations on the Hoo Peninsula, in the Medway Valley, and areas to the south and east of the built up parts of Medway around Capstone and Rainham. It also includes eastern areas in Gravesham borough in Higham and Shorne (see map). The area includes a mixture of farm types, including land in the Kent Downs, the North Kent marshes, and high quality productive land on the Hoo Peninsula. There are substantial areas of land owned by non-agricultural interests, some of which are leased to tenant farmers. Farming sectors represented include field scale vegetables, fruit, arable crops, marshland permanent pasture, and equine. Agri-environment schemes are well established, with the North Kent Marshes Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) running for15 years.



boundary of study area ME = Medway GR = Gravesham

1.5 Farming in the study area - an overview

The largest contiguous area of farmland in the study area runs across the Hoo peninsula from Gravesend in the west to Grain in the east. There are outlying areas at Rainham, Capstone and in the Medway valley.

The farming sectors described above are well distributed across the study area. East of Chatham, Capstone was once an area of cherry orchards but is now all arable, Sharsted Farm in the same area is arable and equine. The small area of farmland between Grange and Lower Rainham has fruit (apples, cherries) and field scale vegetable production. In the Medway valley, Court Farm at Upper Halling has beef sheep and arable, and a deer enterprise, while Upper Bush Farm is all arable. Ranscombe Farm is managed in partnership with Medway Council as a nature reserve, working farm and country park, and has chalk grassland and arable with rare arable flora.

Between Strood and the A289 lies an area of mixed field scale vegetables, arable, salad onion and potato production at Chapter and Little Hermitage Farms. South of Higham there is mixed fruit and arable farming at Gadshill, with more continuous arable between Shorne and Gravesend. North west of Higham, between the A226 and Shorne Marshes is an area of mixed farming; arable, field scale vegetables, and potatoes at East Court and Green Farms, and beef and arable at Queens Farm.

To the east of Higham arable cropping predominates at Whitehouse and Littlechurch Farms. North west of Cliffe Woods at Oakleigh there is field scale vegetables, salad onions, and a worm farm. Between Cliffe Woods and Cliffe, field scale vegetables is the main crop, at Buckland, West Court, Manor and Rye Street Farms. There is equine (at

Gattons Farm) and non farming land use (at Berry Court) between Cliffe and Cooling. East of the B2000, there is top fruit (apples) production at Perry Hill and top (apples and pears) and soft fruit (black currants, blackberries, strawberries, rhubarb) at Mockbeggar and The Mount, and arable at Spendiff, New Barn and Wybournes. North of the A228 at Chattenden there is some sheep, beef and grazing lets from the MOD, while south of the A228 at Stonebridge horses are kept. Further east, Deansgate and Solomons Farms have arable cropping and potatoes, with also a livery and grass grown for hay.

Between Cooling and High Halstow, there is top fruit (pears) and soft fruit production, and some arable. North east of High Halstow, Clinch Street and Newlands farms grow arable crops, and Decoy Farm produces soft fruit (black currants, strawberries, rhubarb). Arable farming predominates between St Mary Hoo and Allhallows; Binney Farm east of Allhallows also has some grass with horses. East and West of Lower Stoke, Mackays Court Farm is an area of mixed farming, with field scale vegetables, arable and beef production on the marshes. Between Lower Stoke and Grain, Allhallows Marshes is arable in its southern part, with rough grazing permanent pasture in the north.

South of the A228, between Stoke and Hoo lies an area of arable and field scale vegetable production; there is also arable cropping and field scale vegetables around Kingsnorth. Immediately to the east of Hoo are apple orchards.

The scene is completed by the extensive area of beef and sheep producing grazing marsh along the coast of the study area, which stretches from Shorne Marshes in the west, through to Allhallows Marshes in the east.

Source; NFU

1.6 Acknowledgements

The study is grateful –

- For the help and information supplied by;

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Strutt & Parker: Nigel Porter
Smiths Gore: David Slack
Sheils Flynn: Kate Collins

- To the speakers at the farmer meeting;
- And to the four farmers who gave individual interviews for the project.

Thanks also to Catherine Smith (Medway Council), Andrea Wright (Gravesham Borough Council) and Martin Hall (Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway).

2. INFROMATION STUDY

2.1 The farming background – national

2.1.1 Overview

Many of the factors set out in this report that influence farming in the study area are not local. They come from EU policies, nationally derived incentive and regulatory schemes, and worldwide factors such as food distribution and demand. Farming operates in its own economic cycle – a threat in another sector may be an opportunity for agriculture. While farmers work day to day under very local conditions – climate, soils, labour – they operate in a global and increasingly changing arena, a fact they recognise.

2.1.2 Relevant 2009 key figures and trends for England

In the UK there are approximately 300, 000 active farms[1], and the average size of these farms is about 57 hectares. Organic farming represents around 4% of the farmed area in the UK.

A major source of farming statistics is the 'June Survey'[2]. The study had data from this survey available at 3 levels:

- England area for 2009 (see this section)
- Kent area for 2008 (see following sections)
- Medway and Gravesham areas for 2007 (see following sections)

The total area on agricultural holdings in England at June 2009[3] increased slightly from 2008 to 9.4 million hectares, and the total croppable area was estimated at 4.9 million hectares. Since June 2008 there has been a decrease of 1% in the cropped area (equivalent to 40 thousand hectares) which now stands at 3.99 million hectares. This has been offset by the 45% increase in arable land out of production which stands at 231 thousand hectares. In June 2009, the total area of fruit and vegetables grown outdoors stood at 140 thousand hectares, an increase of 2% on 2008; orchards, small fruit and vegetables/salad all showed increases. The largest proportion of small fruit is strawberries with 41% of the total area, however wine grapes have shown the largest increase, rising by 14% to just under one thousand hectares.

The area of owner occupied land remained largely similar to that in 2008, at 6.3 million hectares. Similarly, the area of land rented in for more than a year was unchanged from June 2008 at 3.3 million hectares. The area of tenanted land on Full Agricultural Tenancy (FAT) agreements continued to decrease (a 3% fall between June 2008 and June 2009) and the area on Farm Business Tenancy (FBT) agreements saw a 4% increase.

The total number of cattle recorded on 1 June 2009 remained at the same level as June 2008, at 5.5 million. However the dairy breeding herd fell by 3.0% on June 2008,

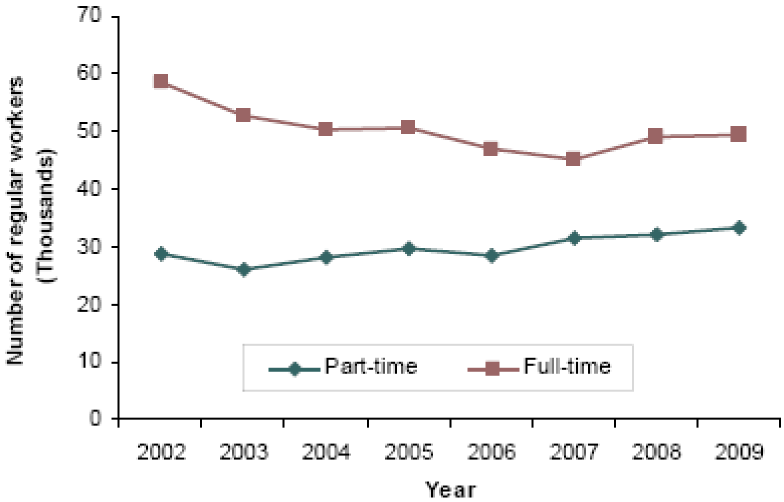
[1] www.ukagriculture.com

[2] Defra: June Survey Of Agriculture And Horticulture England

[3] June Survey Of Agriculture And Horticulture (Land Use And Livestock On Agricultural Holdings At 1 June 2009) England – Final Results

continuing the falls in recent years, which have been prompted by lower milk prices. There were just under 15 million sheep and lambs, a 3.5% decrease on June 2008, and continuing a downward trend since 2005, especially in breeding ewes. This is due to factors such as the impact of diseases especially currently bluetongue, historic poor prices, increased paperwork (including the recently introduced electronic identification scheme), and difficulty finding shepherds.

The total number of people employed in agriculture at 1 June 2009 was 363,000, showing little change from the same period in 2008. The figure below shows the trend since 2002, with part time labour increasing and full time decreasing.

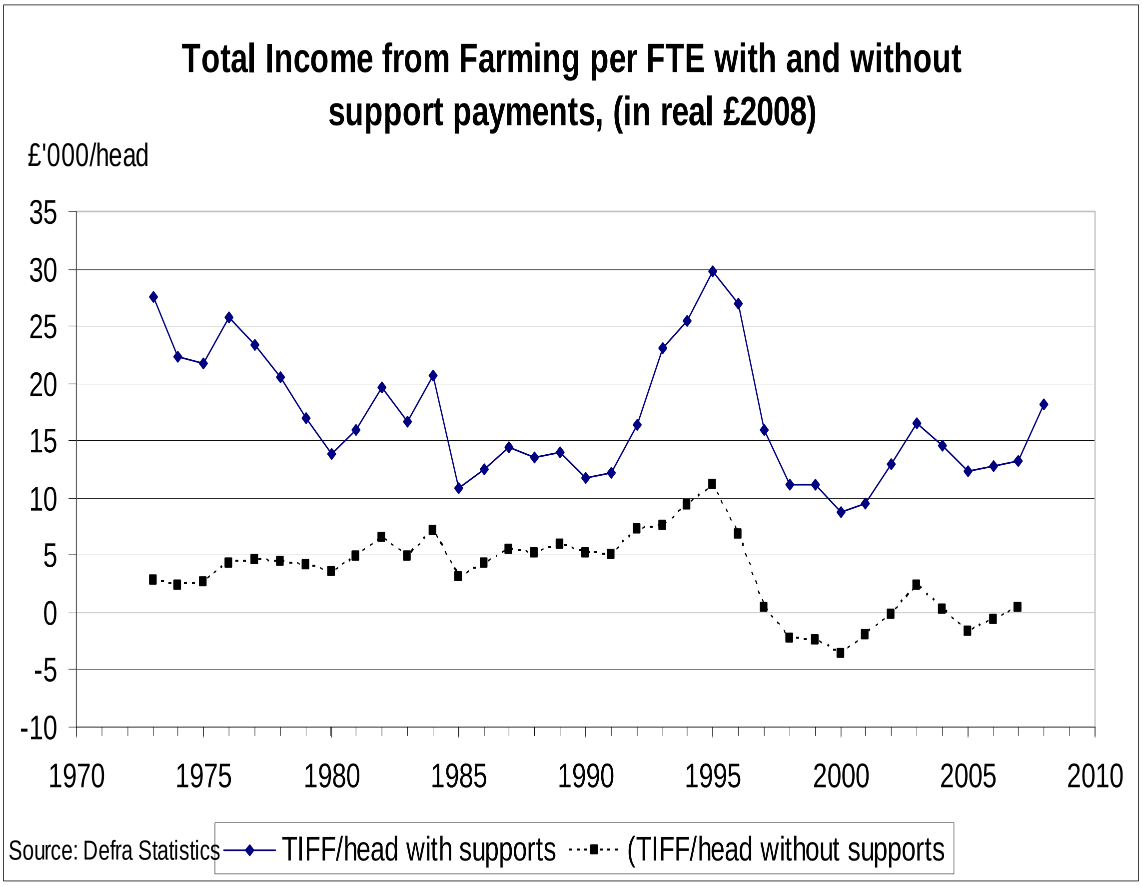


The UK, being an EU member, is also afforded some flexibility to "modulate" support payments (see below), which gives farmers an incentive to channel a proportion of their payments into rural development through the Rural Development Programme for England, and agri-environment schemes, such as the Entry Level Stewardship Scheme and the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. Farmers in England can also receive grants for woodland establishment and management, through the England Woodland Grant Scheme. See further in section [2.2].

2.1.3 Agricultural support

Under reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), there was a major change in 2005 in the way agriculture in the UK was supported financially; farm support was no longer linked to production. Support became independent from the number of livestock carried or the hectares of a crop grown and made through a single payment scheme (SPS) based on the historic production claims of the years 2000 - 2002 inclusive. This new type of payment was phased in over seven years, with the SPS being based initially on the historic entitlement. By the end of the seven year period the historic element will have been fully replaced by a regional average and thus be truly 'decoupled' from production.

Net Farm Income went through a long term decline from the1960's, (reaching a low point in 2000 with an average of just £8700)[1]. In 2007/8 total income from British farming rose by 42% to £3.5bn, but total farm support payments amounted to £3.27bn, almost as much as the total income earned by the industry. Without taking SPS into account, therefore, average per head farm incomes hover at break even at best (see graph below).

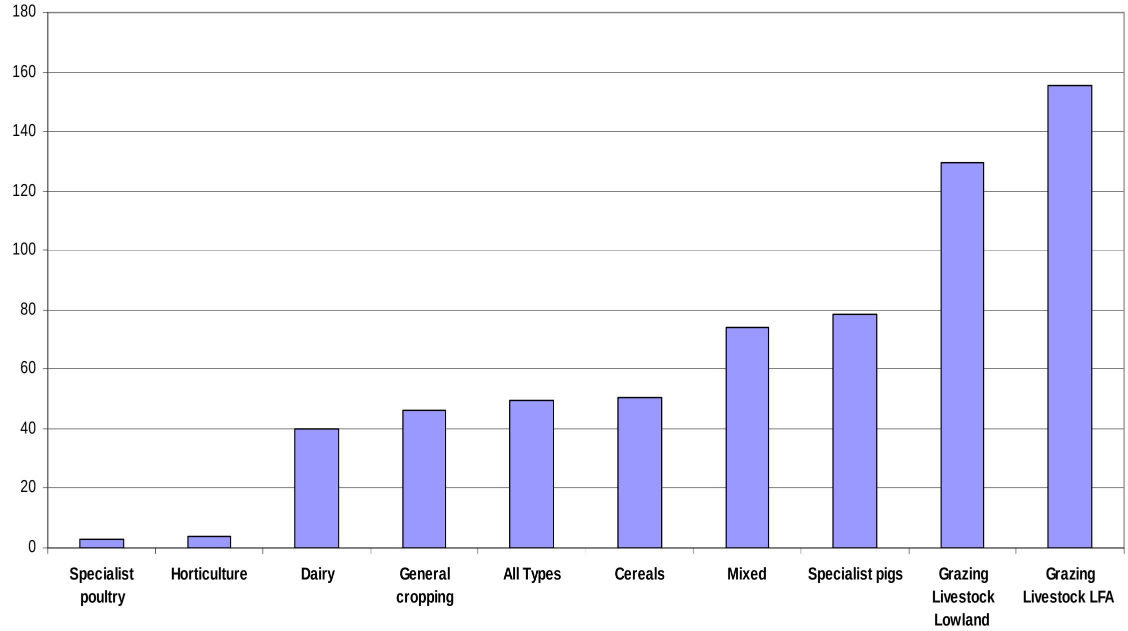


However dependence on single payment scheme (SPS) support varies widely between farm types. Horticulture, which is strongly represented in the study area, has been one of the least supported sectors (see chart below). This is largely for historic reasons; post 1945 the main sectors in farming being meat and cereals production, horticulture then being mainly small scale market gardening, was not seen as so important or as susceptible to global market forces. A situation which contrasts greatly with that today – see later in this section – and as the sector developed, its near market position and high value crops made it unique therefore in being able to capitalise in years of good prices to make good incomes not dependent on SPS. Fresh produce (fruit and vegetables) does however has its own regime under the CAP, primarily through support for producer organisations.

The rules of SPS changed in 2008, so that that farmers who had land used for permanent fruit and vegetables (including commercial orchards), nursery crops and vines in the 2008 reference period, could be eligible to apply in 2009 for new SPS payment entitlements. These new entitlements could then be used to claim payment for the first time in the 2010 scheme year. Additionally, farmers with land under these crops could claim for payment in 2009 against existing SPS entitlements for the 2009 scheme year. However these payments will be small in comparison to the income from horticultural crops, and many may not claim them. Any producer claiming the support will come under cross-compliance regulations.

Source; NFU

Figure 4 Dependence on Single Payments; English Farm Types, 2007/08
Single Payment as percent of Farm Business Income
Source: Defra, Farm Business Survey accounts, 2007/8



With the introduction of the SPS came a statutory 'cross compliance' requirement for farmers set out under European legislation. The requirements for cross compliance mean farmers must adhere to 'Statutory Management Requirements' and keep their land managed to a good agricultural and environmental condition. If a farmer fails to meet these requirements they risk a reduction in their payment. See further in section [2.2.5].

2.1.4 Agricultural economics

Farmland values have risen steadily and now average £5123 / acre in Britain (source; Knight Frank); the higher quality land in the study area has greater values (see section 2.6.11).

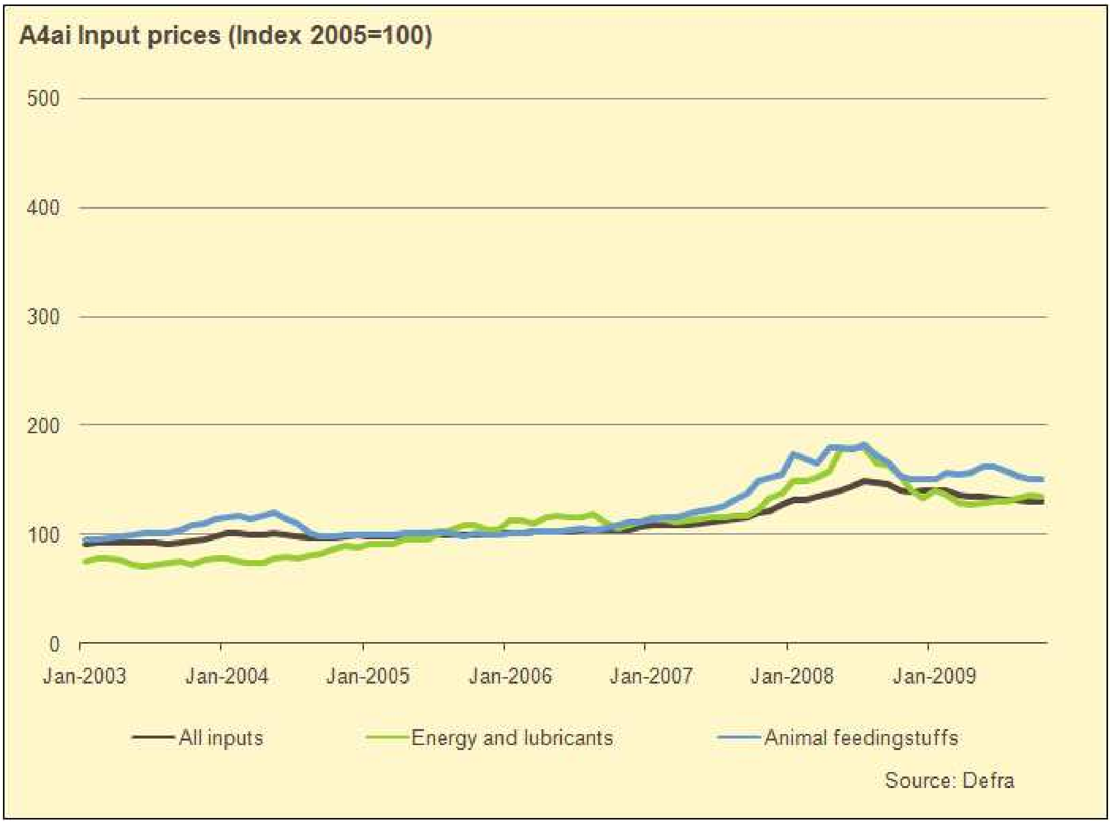
Predicting prices and therefore returns in agriculture has become notoriously difficult. The speed of economic recovery, weather patterns, consumer willingness to pay a premium for home grown food, exchange rates and commodity trading all affect farmgate prices. Some outputs such as milk and feed wheat will not be in profit in 2010 without SPS (source; HSBC Agriculture).

Lamb prices were good in 2009 and declining numbers of animals suggests this will continue into 2010. Conversely beef saw oversupply of the home market in 2009 and margins look to be narrow in 2010 as well. However in both sheep and beef there is a considerable difference in profit margins between average and top performing enterprises (source; EBLEX).

High wheat stocks from the 2009 harvest have kept down wheat prices, while oilseed rape prices are better, driven by firmer crude oil prices. A high level of potato stocks is likely to hold down 2010 prices. (source; Farmers Weekly).

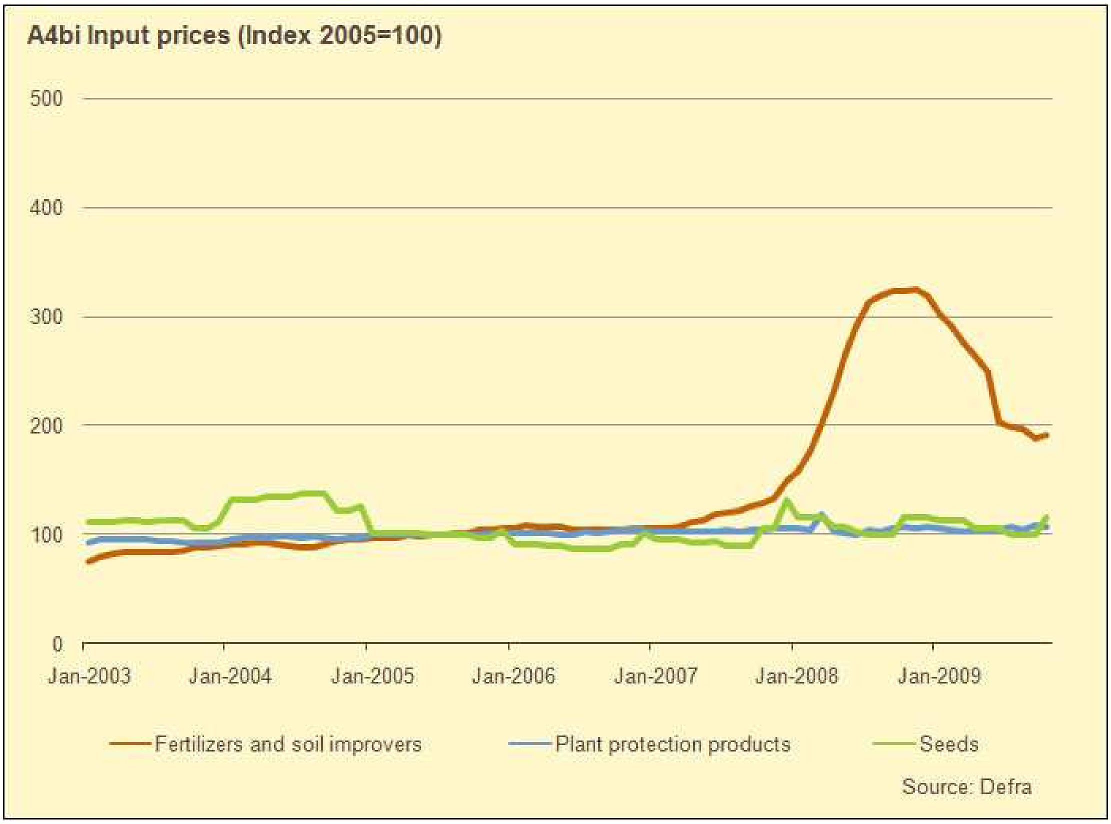
2.1.5 Input prices

The cost of inputs has been a major factor in returns from farming in the last 5 years.



Pesticides, fuel, fertilizer, and other energy-related inputs have all risen sharply, with a particular spike in 2008 for fertiliser costs. These rises reflect trends in world markets, shortage of supply and fluctuations in exchange rates, and have outstripped product price increases.

Source; Defra



2.1.6 The horticulture sector

The multiple retailers dominate the horticulture sector, accounting for 86.4% of fresh produce value spend in 2007. To their suppliers such as the fruit and vegetable growers in the study area, they are able to dictate not just price but instant changes in volumes, times of delivery, specifications, packing and almost every aspect of the production process. The raising or dropping of price by a fractional amount across their high volume production can make the difference between profit and loss to these producers, and is the most significant factor regardless of consumer trends.

Between 1988 and 1993, approximately 55% of fresh produce consumed in the UK was domestically produced. Subsequently production went into decline and fell to 33% in 2006. Change in the decade 1996-2206 is shown in the table below for fruit and vegetables individually.

Sector	Total UK consumption ('000 tonnes)		Imports ('000 tonnes)		UK domestic production and percentage of total UK consumption ('000 tonnes)			
	1996	2006	1996	2006	1996		2006	
Vegetables	4,538	4,198	1,183	1,914	3,355	74%	2,284	54%
Fruit	2,853	3,856	2,487	3,464	366	13%	392	10%
Total	7,391	8,054	3,670	5,378	3,721		2,676	

Source: Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2006

Climate and the growing season impose limits on how far UK growers are able to meet demand for fruit and vegetables. Consumers' expectations of year-round availability of fresh produce such as strawberries, asparagus and salads has led to imports of produce outside of the UK production season. Changes in demand for particular fruits and vegetables and import substitution account for much of the decline in self-sufficiency, but for many crops production levels have been maintained or increased, yet the area of land used to produce them has declined significantly. This has been achieved as a result of new technology, better yields and cost reductions. This suggests that production of indigenous fruit and vegetables could be significantly increased in the next 20-30 years. There will be growth for niche markets such as organics and farmers' markets and in the food service and catering sectors and electronic and internet-based shopping systems.

Source; The Smith Institute 'Feeding Britain' March 2009

2.2 Recent changes and developments / impacts

2.2.1 Overview

Farming is subject to many external influences, apart from those that affect maintaining a profitable business, such the level of return for products and the amount of support for production or environmental goods. The range of regulations that apply to farming make it a sector with a high level of intervention, indeed some recent developments such as waste regulation deliberately seek to bring agriculture to the same level of control as other industries. In addition, land management and the keeping of livestock bring with them risks outside the farmer's control such as disease, and changes in weather patterns linked to climate change.

2.2.2 Bluetongue in Kent

A case of bluetongue detected in October 2007 in livestock near Ashford was the first in Kent. A control zone put around the farm covered the district/borough council areas of Shepway, Thanet, Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Maidstone and Swale. Farmers could then move animals between farms within but not out of the control zone, except to slaughter. With further restrictions imposed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) it was at that point only possible to move sheep from Kent as far as Essex, Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire. With the level of livestock farming in the area, and the importance of cattle and sheep grazing on the marshes, this was a potentially threatening situation, meaning that livestock could potentially run out of space to graze.

With further UK outbreaks, the Defra made all of England and Wales a bluetongue protection zone and introduced compulsory vaccination. In 2008 there were more than 24,000 cases of bluetongue in France while none were reported in England. Currently the UK is a single BTV-8 zone where movement and trade can continue normally, so while the disease initially affected the study area and vaccination is an added cost and work, with the UK now a single control zone, it is no more or less than any other part of Kent / UK. For relatively low value livestock such as sheep non vaccination is an option. With a coastal location and close to infected areas in Belgium and France, however, farmers in the study area are being vigilant and choosing to vaccinate.

Source: South East Farmer and NFU

2.2.3 Foot and Mouth Disease in Kent (FMD)

While there were few cases of FMD in Kent in the epidemic of 2001 (5 infected premises on which 162 cattle and 3,191 sheep were slaughtered), a larger number of livestock (1,173 cattle and 11,587 sheep) were slaughtered on neighbouring farms to contain the disease. One of these outbreaks was on the Isle of Grain. The first UK outbreak of the FMD was in south Essex and imposed an immediate control zone that covered most of the study area and lasted through the outbreak. This impacted hugely on livestock farms in the area, which were prevented from moving livestock during the epidemic. This lead to significant animal welfare problems for livestock held on holdings without sufficient fodder and resulted in major cashflow problems for farmers.

The legacy of FMD continues, largely through a statutory '20 day standstill' that prevents any cattle, sheep, pigs or goats moving off a farm (other than to slaughter) for 20 days after any livestock of these species have moved onto the farm. These controls have changed the way that livestock are traded, with greater use of private treaty sales between farms and between farmer and abattoir and a reduction in the role of livestock dealers buying cattle for quick onward sale. The closure of livestock markets for most of 2001 led to a reduction in numbers and Ashford is now the only Kent Market. Such changes in trading patterns have hastened the end of a way of life, centred around auction markets, for many traditional beef and sheep farmers.

Source: Kent County Council, 2002, Land Based Economy, Final Report

2.2.4 Waste Regulations

The Agricultural Waste Regulations came into force in England and Wales in 2006. Agricultural waste became a controlled waste subject to the same legislative controls as waste from other industries. Historically, farmers disposed of the majority of their waste in on-farm dumps or through open air burning. This is no longer legal, unless the farmer has permits, licences or waste exemptions, or uses licensed waste facilities capable of dealing with the waste generated. Farmers also need to comply with the Hazardous Waste Controls in the same way as other business sectors, although there is no need to register if less than 200kg of hazardous waste is produced in a year.

The majority of farm minor waste activities have an exemption from the requirement to have a licence, and nearly every farm requires some exemptions. There are currently 26 Agricultural Waste Exemptions that farmers can register for. Examples include;

- The beneficial use of waste e.g. use of tyres on a silage clamp
- Burning in the open of plant matter e.g. wood and bark

Each exemption has certain conditions – for example on the types and quantities of waste it applies to. An Exemption Review is taking place at the moment, which will result in many fewer exemptions in the future, but more simple permits (for activities such as landspreading).

There are no waste issues specific to the study area, but the Regulations are an important watershed in making farming subject to the same legislative controls as waste from other industries.

Source; Environment Agency

Plastic recycling centres exist within and outside the study area. Plastic recycling is important to the farming industry in potentially being able to take material that is otherwise costly to dispose of such as plant pots and seed trays, or fertiliser bags. See Appendix [1] for details of two schemes.

www.environment-agency.gov.uk/business/sectors/32777.aspx

2.2.5 Cross-compliance

To receive direct payments under the single payment scheme (SPS) (see section 2.3.2), farmers must meet certain standards (Statutory Management Requirements) concerning public, animal and plant health, the environment and animal welfare and keep their land in good agricultural and environmental condition. Where farmers fail to meet those standards, the direct payments they can claim are reduced or even withdrawn completely for the year concerned. Member States must also ensure that there is no significant reduction in permanent pasture as a percentage of their total agricultural area.

The requirements have implications that span most aspects of the industry from animal welfare, tagging, and disease prevention (Foot and Mouth and Bluetongue) to farm waste disposal. They especially affect farms in areas of the UK designated Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZ's), which includes a large part of the study area, where the farmer is also required to follow additional regulation to prevent water pollution through run-off and soil erosion. See further in section [2.2.7]

A key cross-compliance requirement affecting farmers in the study area with its many km of ditches, is the need establish a protective buffer zone alongside hedges and 'seasonably wet watercourses', if such a zone does not already exist. This needs to measure two metres from the centre of the hedge or ditch and extend at least one metre from the top of a bank into the field. ELS buffer strips must start where the cross compliance strip ends. A farmer must not cultivate or use fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides on the buffer zone, or trim hedgerows between 1 March and 31 July.

Maintaining all land classified as 'agricultural' in good condition when not in production includes measures such as controlling notable weed species and removing invasive scrub. Other conditions include drawing up a simple soil risk-assessment management plan to identify any vulnerable areas for soil erosion and sedimentation. Existing restrictions on overgrazing and supplementary feeding also apply, in addition to other conditions.

www.crosscompliance.org.uk

2.2.6 Catchment Sensitive Farming

Pollution caused by agriculture can have serious eutrophic effects on local rivers, lakes, estuaries and coastal waters. The effects of this include increased algae growth and depleted oxygen levels. The main cause of agricultural diffuse pollution is overloading of nutrients (inorganic and organic) from production, storage or spreading on fields. The excess nutrients can then be lost from the agricultural system by surface run off in to streams and rivers.

Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) is a joint initiative between Defra, Environment Agency and Natural England, and a pro-active approach to diffuse pollution. This can be done by reducing agricultural sources of diffuse pollution within river catchments, through land management practices, to ensure that emissions to water are consistent with ecological requirements. Catchments identified as priority areas for action are targeted under a range of measures aimed at improving farm practices and reducing water pollution from agriculture. Advisers work on a one to one basis with farmers to help reduce pollution and encourage good farm practice. Capital grants are available.

The study area is not a Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) priority catchment so does not qualify for special measures and the advice programme.

2.2.7 Nitrate Vulnerable Zones

Extensions to the designated areas mean that since 2008 68% of England is covered by Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZ). The objective is to protect waters against pollution by nitrates from agriculture to water and meet the European Communities Nitrates Directive. Holdings in existing NVZ must comply with new rules from 1st Jan 2009, those in the new 2008 NVZs must comply from 1st January 2010, although there is additional time for certain requirements such as storage.

Summary of rules:

- Livestock Manure N Farm Limit: Establishes a limit of 170 kg/ha of total N from livestock manures (deposited during grazing and by spreading) per calendar year, averaged across the farmed area. Records of livestock details and imported manures must be kept as per the original NVZ rules.

- Organic Manure N Field Limit – total N content must not exceed 250 kg N/ha in any 12 month period.

- Closed period (organic manures): Prohibits the spreading of organic manures with high available nitrogen content during specified periods. The length of the closed periods ranges from 3 – 4 months, and it applies to all soil types.

- Manure storage: Requires farms to provide sufficient storage facilities to store pig slurry & poultry manure for 6 months (1 Oct – 1 Apr) and other livestock slurry eg. cattle for 5 months (1 Oct – 1 Mar).
  From the end of the closed period until the last day in Feb, the maximum amount of slurry that can be applied to land at any one time is 50 m^3/ha and 8 t/ha of poultry manure. There must be at least 3 weeks between applications.
  By 30 April 2009 or by 30 April 2010 if new designation in 2008, farmer must complete a calculation showing existing storage capacity and whether extra storage capacity is needed. Sufficient storage must be in place by 1 January 2012 for all farms within NVZs.

- Temporary field heaps must not be sited within 10m of a watercourse or effective land drain, 50m of borehole/spring/well. Sites must be marked on risk assessment map & record dates of use. Max storage period of 12 months – no return within 2 years.

- Planning nitrogen (N) use – keep records showing – crop type & date sown, SNS, crop N requirement, & details of planned organic manure & fertiliser use – to be updated with actual amounts applied.

- Closed period (manufactured nitrogen fertilisers): Prohibits the spreading of manufactured nitrogen fertiliser during specified periods unless there is a crop nitrogen requirement.

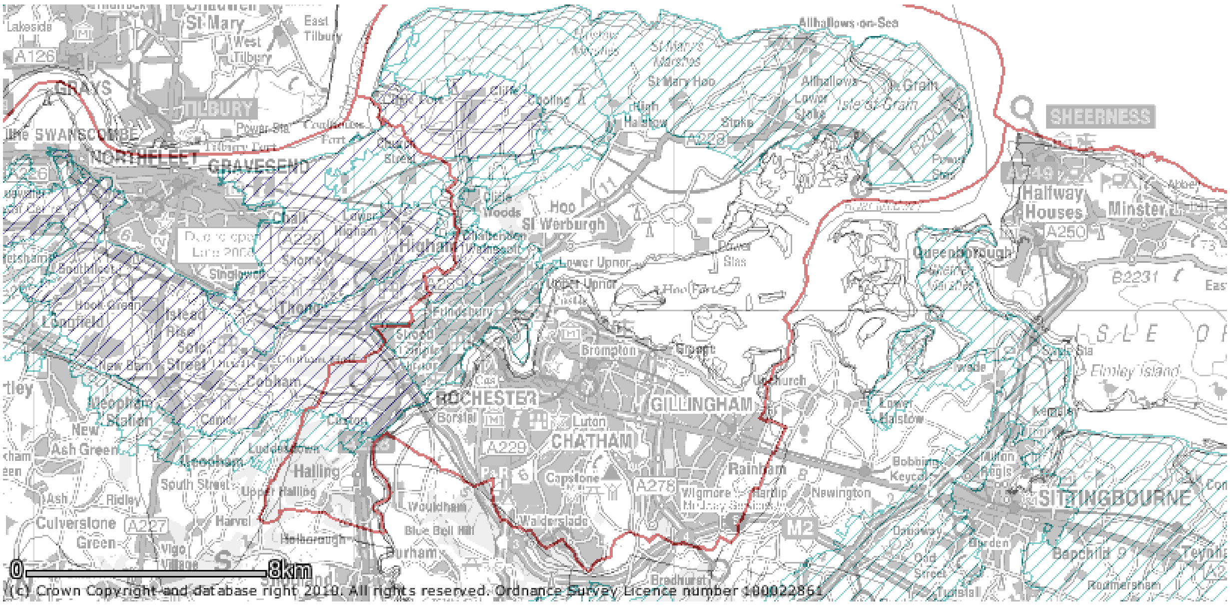
- Crop N requirement limit – <u>Nmax</u>: For each main crop type the average application rate of crop available N from livestock manure & artificial N fertiliser must not exceed the maximum application rate for the crop type - assuming a set level of efficiency of nitrogen supply from any organic manure applications. Field records must be kept to demonstrate compliance.

- Keeping N out of surface waters – By 1 Jan 2010 all farmers must carry out a risk assessment if they use organic manures and produce a risk map to identify suitable field locations. Map must also show temporary manure field heaps.

- Spreading techniques: High trajectory (>4m) application techniques for spreading slurry prohibited from 1 January 2012. Additionally, applications of organic manure (liquid and solid) to bare soil or stubble will require incorporation within 24 hours into the soil in certain situations.

- Spreading fertiliser and organic manure must be avoided when soil is waterlogged, flooded, snow covered or frozen for >12hours.
  Organic manures must not be spread within 10m of surface water (land managed for certain stewardship targets exempt) and 50m of a spring, well or borehole.
  Artificial N fertiliser must not be spread within 2m of surface water.
  <u>New</u>: A field inspection must be carried out to assess the risk of run-off to surface water before spreading artificial N fertiliser or organic manure. This will take into account – slope, land drains, ground cover, proximity to surface water, weather conditions and soil type.

- Record-keeping: Establishes a requirement to keep a record of all N applications to land to facilitate compliance checking, and all to keep records of livestock numbers kept on the holding. Computer (Planet)/Paper templates will be made available.



The study area is almost completely covered by NVZ restrictions since the 2008 extension, except for an area around Hoo and High Halstow (see map). Although the regulations are very wide ranging and cover every type of production, there are no NVZ issues specific to it. Fruit is probably the least affected sector as it has low fertiliser input, followed by the extensive livestock on the marshes, while vegetable production uses nitrogen but in a very targeted way. The least NVZ compliant sector, dairy, is absent, however any production, storage and use of N containing manure will fall under the regulations. This applies to all farming types in the study area, including horses if kept commercially, and without a CSF type of initiative some smaller or 'low tech' holdings could be caught unawares.

In broader terms meeting the requirements of the Water Framework Directive is high on the Environment Agency agenda, who will be starting to target areas with failing water bodies where agriculture has been identified as a factor.

Source; Environment Agency

www.defra.gov.uk/environment/water/quality/nitrate/nvz2008

2.2.8 Climate change

Climate change is both a threat and opportunity for farming in the study area. Temperature and rainfall changes will make cropping less predictable, and in addition depleted fossil fuels will highlight agriculture energy use. There are particular issues associated with soil management from climate change. These are very relevant to the study area, which already has low rainfall, where timely soil management is critical to successful crop production, and where fresh produce needs to be harvested in optimum conditions:

- Increased intensity of wind or rainfall may erode topsoil and remove nutrients, which end up in watercourses and release more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.
- Less summer rainfall will increase drought risk, affecting soil stability and structure.
- Lower soil moisture in early autumn could reduce germination in some crops.

- More days with saturated soil in winter and early spring can damage crop roots and increase risk of compaction, causing surface run-off.
- Increased variability in the number and timing of machinery work days affecting harvest.

On the other hand there is also potential in the area for;
- New crops such as viticulture, able to thrive in lower rainfall and higher summer temperatures
- Carbon storage (sequestration) in grassland and soils
- Growing energy crops for products to replace fossil fuels such as bioethanol
- Renewable energy sources such as wind energy and solar power

Source; Farming Futures

www.farmingfutures.co.uk

Organisations that help with non food crops and carbon auditing:
http://www.nnfcc.co.uk/metadot/index.pl?id=0
http://www2.cplan.org.uk/

Water is a particular issue in the study area, with high value crops with irrigation needs competing for scarcer water resources. Water supply in Medway is largely dependent on ground water abstraction. There are no large reservoirs or any abstraction from the River Medway. Water resources face increasing demand arising from existing and new development, exacerbated by changes to the climate and rainfall patterns. Without action there will be a water supply deficit in Medway by 2008 – 2010. Southern Water though have a plan which should avoid this and maintain a reliable supply through to 2030 if it is implemented in full and the climate change assumptions used prove to be correct. However the margin for error is very small - around 5%.

Source; Medway Local Development Framework

http://ww2.medway.gov.uk/FTP/Cabinet_Decisions/is887/reports/report_887_1240.doc

The maps below show some projections of how the UK climate may change for the 30-year period from 2070–2099 (called the 2080s) at a resolution of 25 km for the South East. These maps give a range of climate that that might be expected, together with the probability of different outcomes based on the strength of evidence. The central estimate is given by the centre map. The predicted future effects of climate change in the South East are a warmer climate, with drier summers and wetter winters. Extreme events such as floods and droughts are likely to become less predictable and possibly more frequent. In addition, there is concern about sea-level changes leading to inundation of low-lying coastal areas.

Source: UK Climate Impacts Programme

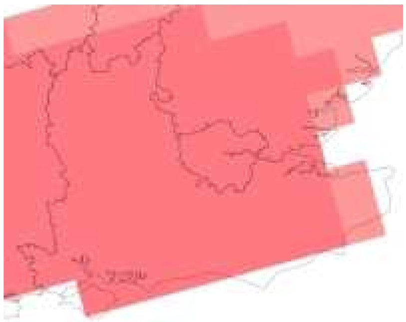
http://www.ukcip.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=630&Itemid=9

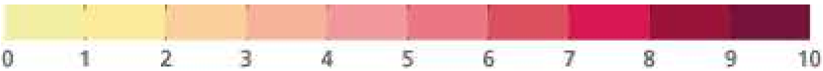
Change in annual mean temperature for the 2080s under a medium emissions scenario

10% probability level:
very unlikely to be less than

50% probability level:
central estimate

90% probability level:
very unlikely to be greater than

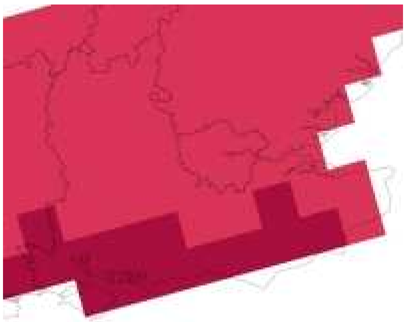




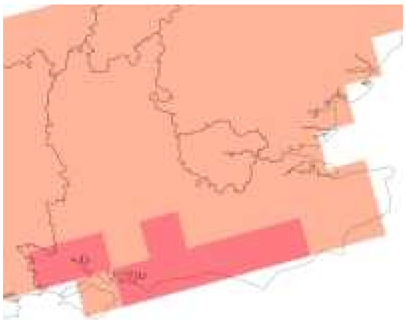
Change in summer mean temperature (ºC)
Medium emissions

Change in summer mean precipitation for the 2080s under a medium emissions scenario

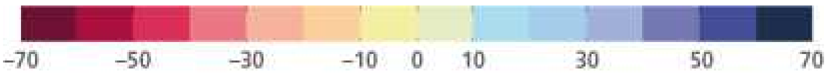
10% probability level:
very unlikely to be less than



50% probability level:
central estimate



90% probability level:
very unlikely to be greater than



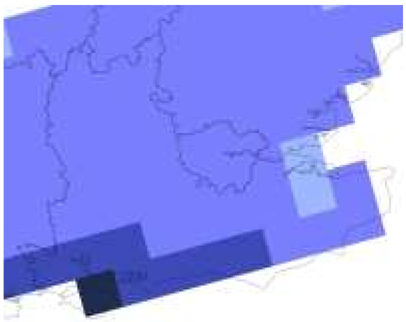
Change in summer mean precipitation
(%) Medium emissions

Change in winter mean precipitation for the 2080s under a medium emissions scenario

10% probability level:
very unlikely to be less than

50% probability level:
central estimate

90% probability level:
very unlikely to be greater than



Change in winter mean precipitation (%)
Medium emissions

2.3 Policy, incentives and opportunities

2.3.1 Overview

Farming in the study area is rarely a 'free agent'. Most of those that do not engage in the 'second pillar' of EU rural development are likely to be getting support from the 'first pillar', via the Single Payment Scheme. In the horticulture sector where little of this support has been available, the 'free market' of supply has in reality become dominated by the large retailers.

There is pressure to continue reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) begun with the introduction of the Single Payment Scheme and to cut the agriculture share of the EU budget. At the same time, there is acceptance of payments for public goods from land managers, and rural development schemes offer a wide range of incentives. The study area has a 'foot in both camps' with arable barely profitable without SPS, horticulture traditionally least the reliant on support, and the grazing marshes producing public goods via Environmental Stewardship. Since the early 1990ies incentives in the form of agri-environment schemes have targeted farming for its potential to deliver management of habitat and species and with the aim of reversing decline in key species and better management of key sites such as SSSI.

2.3.2 CAP reform and Single Payment Scheme

The 2003 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) introduced a new system of direct payments , known as the single payment scheme, under which aid is no longer linked to production (decoupling). Most of the support provided in the different sectors has been transferred to a new system of direct payments. The single payment scheme (SPS) is the most important system of direct payments.

The main aim of the single payment is to guarantee farmers more stable incomes. Farmers can decide what to produce in the knowledge that they will receive the same amount of aid, allowing them to adjust production to suit demand. To be eligible for the single payment, a farmer requires payment entitlements. These are calculated on the basis of the payments received by the farmer during a reference period (historical model) or the number of eligible hectares farmed during the first year of implementation of the scheme (regional model).

Source; EU bulletin Agriculture and Rural Development / Agricultural markets

Many EU member states, especially the UK, believe the CAP share of the budget must decline. Currently this is €53b p.a. or 1% of EU public expenditure or 0.4% of EU GDP. There is a wide acceptance of payments for public goods from land managers, while farmers' organisations argue a food security case for continued protection and income support. Future options for the SPS are;

- Cut the overall budget
- Redistribute where support goes, e.g. converge on an average €/ha
- Switch production support to payments for public goods

Source; CLA presentation to Natural England Autumn Conference 2009

Traditionally, the two main farmer representative bodies (National Farmers Union and Country Land and Business Association) have been united on the need for continued support to farm production. A recent joint paper from the European Landowners Organisation to which the CLA belongs and Bird Life International, however, has called for the CAP to prioritize rural development and agri environmental measures. This statement has drawn criticism from the NFU, and makes a clear distinction in the argument for farm support between the CLA view that the CAP should use public money to fund key public goods - protection of the environment as well as food security – and the NFU position, that the aim should be a competitive and productive agriculture in which protecting the environment is a side effect of agricultural policy.

http://www.cla.org.uk/Policy_Work/Proposals_for_the_future_CAP/

Set aside, introduced as a supply control mechanism under the CAP, had environmental benefits which it was feared may be lost with its abolition. Threat of a compulsory replacement scheme has lead to a voluntary UK scheme being set up (see further below).

2.3.3 Environmental Stewardship (agri-environment schemes)

New Entry Level and Higher Level Stewardship schemes are replacing Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) and Countryside Stewardship (CSS) Schemes.
66% (6m Ha) of land in England is now under agri-environment schemes, a £400m investment per annum. There are around 4, 500 agreements in the South East.

Entry Level Stewardship (ELS) is open to all farmers and landowners who are either freeholders, tenants, or contractual licensees. There is a flat rate payment of £30 per hectare over the whole holding, including woodland if registered. The contract is for 5 years. Points are awarded for existing good stewardship as well as for introducing new management. Applicants need to identify, measure and retain important environmental features and areas on the farm.

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) focuses on biodiversity, landscape, heritage, access and resource protection (soils, air and water), targeted towards high local priority habitats and areas and usually needs to be underpinned by an ELS application. A detailed Farm Environmental Plan (FEP) needs to be prepared before an application is submitted. Capital grants are available. The contract is for 10 years.

In 2009 North West Kent, which includes the study area, had 20 HLS applications, 81% of its target. The 2010/11 HLS targets are shown below:

Team	Classic	New	Total	Budget Allocated
Cotswolds & Clay Vales	58	12	70	£1,400,000.00
Chilterns & North Wessex Downs	17	18	35	£700,000.00
East Kent	12	28	40	£800,000.00
Hampshire Downs	28	32	60	£1,200,000.00
New Forest & Isle of Wight	12	23	35	£700,000.00
Surrey Hills & Heaths	6	14	20	£400,000.00
Weald & Pevensey	76	24	100	£2,000,000.00
North West Kent	14	26	40	£800,000.00
Totals	**223**	**177**	**400**	**£8,000,000.00**

The study area has been a large part of the ESA and is a natural target for transfer to HLS. There will be a critical issue where applicants need to get into or renew ELS either as a stand alone scheme, or alongside their HLS, which may see some drop out. The larger arable units will be impacted by the loss of the ELS 'management plan' options, while fruit and vegetable producers have always struggled to find 'spare' land and features eligible for the schemes. Other farmers have simply chosen not to take Environmental Stewardship in favour of 'freedom to farm'. With the first ELS renewals due in 2010, and the launch of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment (see below), this issue needs work by Natural England and others to engage or retain farmers as 'stewards'.

Medway Higher Level Stewardship targets

- Chalk grassland restoration/creation (in the Kent Downs part of the study area)
- Nationally important populations of rare arable plants. (e.g. Ranscombe Farm)
- Farmland birds (across the arable and horticultural areas)
- Wet grassland (the North Kent marshes ESA designated areas)
- Access (farmland bordering urban areas, green corridors, educational access)

From the start of 2010 Natural England are adopting a more pro-active 'pipeline' approach to HLS. The NE local team will identify a list of potential applicants delivering to HLS objectives in order reach targets. These lists will be drawn together from expiring agreements, local advisor knowledge, a 'holding assessment toolkit' (HAT) and information from stakeholders and partners.

www.naturalengland.org.uk

2.3.4 England Woodland Grant Scheme

Although HLS is increasingly picking up small sale woodland management, larger woodlands are suitable for the Forestry Commission England Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS), a set of grants that are available for the management and planting of woodland. Some are target based for specific important and rare species or important areas, and others are more general and apply throughout the South East Region. Sites of Special Scientific Interest and plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) are especially targeted. Funding is limited and subject to proposals meeting the rules of the scheme and the particular grant applied for, as well as wider environmental standards. Woodland must be registered on the Rural Land Register.

Medway England Woodland Grant Scheme targets

Applications for new woodland planting score higher if close to population centres, within 10 minutes walking distance of a community, bus stop or railway station and within a 'growth area' such as the Thames Gateway. Grant rates changed in 2009 giving financial improvements to grants including up to £3,800 per ha capital grant plus annual payments for Farm Woodland and from the Single Payment Scheme for creating new woods near towns.

http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-6DCCEN

2.3.5 Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE)

Changes to cross compliance standards including recapturing the environmental benefits of set-aside, are being pursued through an industry driven voluntary approach, known as the Campaign for the Farmed Environment, led by the CLA and NFU. The focus is on three key themes, Resource Protection, Farmland Birds and Wider Biodiversity and will be delivered via a greater uptake of in-field options within ELS and topped up with voluntary measures. The industry needs to meet a number of national CFE targets over a three-year period (to June 2012) mainly focused on ELS take up, or face compulsory environmental set aside.

CFE is aimed at farmers and growers, primarily arable farmers and those growing other field crops, who can be sub-divided into three groups:

1. Farmers with Environmental Stewardship agreements
2. Farmers who do not have an ELS agreement but may be persuaded to do so
3. Farmers who do not wish to be part of a formal stewardship agreement

In recognition of the critical role that farm advisers play in assisting growers in making cropping and land management decisions CFE also targets farm advisers and agronomists.

CFE encourages farmers to retain uncropped land and take up ELS options or voluntary management that is likely to be of greatest benefit to the environment, whilst at the same time being agronomically reasonable. A number of research studies have shown that the environmental benefits of set-aside were coincidental, site-specific and often depended on the level of additional management of land that was left uncropped by farmers. In addition the types of benefits (e.g. specific farmland bird species prevalent in one area) differed from area to area, so a targeted approach is more likely to deliver benefits than a blanket approach. Therefore CFE encourages farmers to take up different measures, depending on their location, farming system and the particular environmental problems or benefits that exist in that area.

CFE has agreed to meet a number of national targets over a three-year period (to June 2012). These include:
- Supporting increased uptake of ELS to achieve Natural England's target of utilisable agricultural area in the Scheme.
- Doubling the take-up of key in-field options within ELS.
- Retaining a certain level of uncropped land or land that is not in agricultural production (179,000 hectares across England) and seeking to improve the management of at least a third of this land.
- Increasing the level of voluntary environmental management undertaken by farmers by at least 30,000 hectares beyond the level that exists currently.
- Promote participation in environmental management with the aim of getting 60% of farmers not engaged in ELS to undertake some form of voluntary environmental management effort on their land.

The increased take up of, and renewal into, ELS in the study area mentioned in section [2.3.3] above is therefore crucial in contributing to the success of CFE. In as far as some farm types or indeed individual farmers in the study area may not be able or willing to take on ELS, persuading these into voluntary environmental management for CFE will be crucial. CFE voluntary measures option C12b 'pollen and nectar mixtures for horticultural crops' offers an opportunity to growers to undertake measures of environmental benefit that may not be open to them in ELS.

All 3 key themes will feature as targets local to the study area for CFE:

- Resource Protection; good agricultural practice in soil and water management and protection in the arable and horticultural areas.
- Farmland Birds (which also features in HLS targeting); grey partridge, turtle dove, yellow wagtail, tree sparrow, corn bunting and yellowhammer are key species in the study area.
- Wider Biodiversity – for example measures to conserve the habitat of the shrill carder bee (*Bombus sylvarum*) for which the study area is a stronghold.

www.cfeonline.com

2.3.6 RDPE / Leader

RDPE is the rural development programme for England, designed to assist and encourage rural development through a range of measures. These cover training and skills, renewable energy, adding value to primary produce, improved management of water resources, farm diversification, forestry, and adding value to livestock. The scheme is administered in the SE region by SEEDA, Natural England and the Forestry Commission. A £3.9bn national budget is available to farmers, horticulturalists, foresters, rural businesses and community projects. RDPE is delivered through 4 Axes - NB Axis 2 of the scheme delivers the forestry and agri-environment schemes, axis 4 is the Leader programme (q.v.). Grant rates are up to 40% - there is no limit, but local budgets will influence size of award for farmers and horticulturalists.

An application needs to include:

- All necessary consents including planning

- Three competitive quotes for all expenditure
- A business plan or budget
- Landlords approval, security of tenure for 6 years
- Three years accounts

Leader is a funding axis of RDPE, with grant money available up to 2013. Decisions for funding are made by Local Action Groups (LAG) in support of locally identified priorities within defined area and population based catchments. Farmers, foresters, businesses and community projects are eligible for funding. Kent has two Leader areas, West Kent and Kent Downs and Marshes (KDM), covering a total of more than 283,000 rural residents, and with a combined project budget of almost £3.5m

LAG objectives;

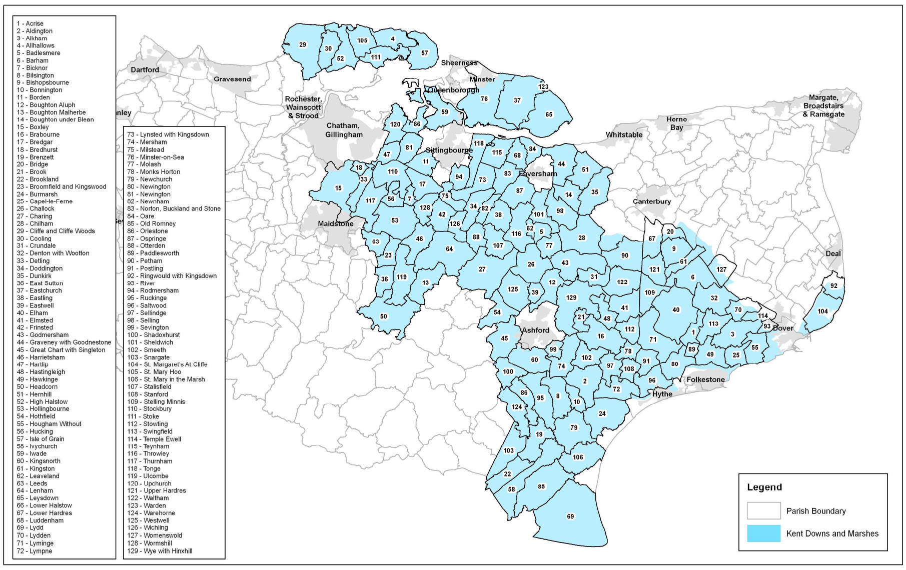
- Developing a pioneering and sustainable rural economy
- Fostering vibrant rural communities
- Valuing the rural environment

Applicants can apply for up to £50,000 of funding - all projects will require some degree of match funding. The percentage of funding varies according to the measure, and ranges from 40 to up to 100% (in exceptional circumstances). Funding is paid retrospectively. Applicants need to have all planning consent and all relevant permits in place prior to applying.

Relevance to Medway

Eligible KDM Leader parishes in the study area (see map);

- Cliffe and Cliffe Woods
- Cooling
- High Halstow
- St Mary Hoo
- Stoke
- Allhallows
- Isle of Grain



So far the KDM Leader as a whole has funded ten projects and committed £245,000. There has been one approved project in the study area, for £50,000 to convert a rundown farm building the Hoo Peninsula into self catering holiday accommodation. This is part of a much wider project to develop another barn on the farm into B&B accommodation and help with the fluctuating income from the farm itself.

KDM is particularly keen to receive applications for funding from farmers or communities for projects. All the Parish Councils have been sent information and a meeting is to be set up with the NFU to see how to best get farmers interested. Contact has been made with Medway Council and a follow up meeting is planned with Medway tourism team to discuss possible ways forward.

Source; Kent Downs and Marshes Leader Programme

www.kentruralnetwork.org.uk/leader

RDPE grants direct from SEEDA are highly relevant to study area farm businesses in all categories, and could cover a wide range of projects. Some of the opportunities link to other characteristics of the area such as the impact of climate change, local food or tourism. For example SEEDA give grant up to £8000 for horticultural businesses to make better use of water resources, by actions such as making winter storage reservoirs or water collection and recycling.

www.seeda.co.uk/rdpe

The relatively low limit to Leader grant, plus the documentation required for all RDPE schemes (especially to have planning permission in place) may be an obstacle to active take up of grants.

2.3.7 Market led initiatives

Assured Food Standards is an industry led scheme that makes up £5.3 billion worth of 'Red Tractor' assured food sold in major British supermarkets every year. The six sectors covered are beef and lamb (Assured British Meats); dairy (Assured Dairy Farms); fresh produce (Assured Produce); combinable crops and sugar beet (Assured Combinable Crops Scheme), pigs (Assured British Pigs) and poultry (Assured Chicken Production). Following a major review to ensure more consistency between the schemes, 45,000 producers across the UK will begin to implement revised standards across farm sectors from April. Existing standards will be rebranded "Red Tractor Farm Assurance" to highlight the logo's direct link with food items marketed under the Red Tractor logo. The Schemes use recognised frameworks such as Integrated Crop Management, which means Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) with emphasis on reducing the use of pesticides, optimum use of fertilisers and care for the environment. Livestock producers must meet all of the needs of their animals and respect the principles of the 'Five Freedoms' set by the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

www.redtractor.org.uk

Several major retailers have operated their own standards and procedures for the development of good agricultural practice for some time. The results are very demanding protocols which focus the farm producer on the key issues that need to be addressed during the pre-farm gate stage. These cover all inputs such pesticides and fertilisers, energy and water use, animal welfare, business planning, biodiversity and landscape. They have been driven by many factors including market competitiveness, desire to reassure consumers on issues of food safety and environment, and provide a whole of chain assurance from 'food to fork' (the name of one of the supermarket schemes).

An attempt is being made by LEAF – Linking Environment And Farming – to bring together a single set of standards acceptable to all the retailers; the 'LEAF Marque'.
The LEAF Marque standard is based on the principles of Integrated Farm Management (IFM) but principally aims to recognise farmers who employ advanced resource management in the protection and enhancement of their total farm environment and landscape.

www.leafmarque.com

The primary products in the study area – field scale vegetables, fruit, beef, sheep and arable have all had some level of engagement with these 'assurance schemes', which while they raise environmental standards are numerous, and often seen as another example of supermarket power.

As 'near market' producers with strong links to the retailers, the horticulture sector in particular has been engaged with assurance schemes for many years. This means in practice for example strict observation of thresholds and record keeping on pesticide inputs. The number of different schemes, each with paperwork and inspection processes, is often resented. This sector may well also feel aggrieved that it has demonstrated GAP for many years yet is the sector least able to benefit from agri-environment schemes. In as far as less stringent protocols are applied, to some extent beef and lamb producers, and to a lesser extent arable growers, in the area are also 'assured' through the Red Tractor scheme described above.

2.3.8 Direct marketing

There are 16 farm shops within the study area, and farmers markets at Gravesend, Meopham, Vigo, Rochester and Hemptstead Valley. See Appendix [2] for details.

Farm shops and farmers markets offer an opportunity to supply produce direct. Farmers markets claim they maintain the viability of local farmers and so sustain and protect the countryside, and in using fewer food miles help to protect the environment. Farm shops and farmers markets are also part of adding value through the food chain identified in as of particular significance in Kent agriculture (see further in section 2.5).

There are practical Issues with local supply outlets. The high volume output of large producers is usually dedicated to supplying the retailers (often via an intermediary) and not suited to diverting staff and time to a second, smaller supply line. Direct retailing of prepared products brings the vendor into compliance with labelling and food safety legislation. Where selling fresh produce is concerned, this outlet is often better suited to small 'market garden' producers. However substituting a large volume supply through local procurement or a 'food hub' might be alternative.

A list of tender opportunities are posted for local procurement, where farmers can register for free and be alerted to forthcoming enders in the region. The NFU also post relevant national contracts on their web pages.

www.supply2.gov.uk
www.nfuonline.com

A feasibility study has been undertaken by the South East Food Group Partnership and recommends the development of a 'food hub' to support the food sector in the regions around London.

http://www.sefgp.co.uk/

2.4 The farming background – the south east of England

2.4.1 Overview

The region is physically diverse, from the open, rolling South Downs to the costal marshes of Kent. It contains a diversity of nationally and internationally important habitats many of which were created by traditional farming practices such as livestock grazing on the North Kent Marshes. However the South East is the most developed region outside of London (developed land represents 23% of the total) and its proximity to London, as well as fast growing urban centres such as Reading and the Thames Gateway, and mainland Europe via ports and railway presents a series of threats and opportunities for its rural areas[4].

2.4.2 Pressures and opportunities

The SE has intense pressure on land from development and regional growth (Ashford, Milton Keynes and Thames Gateway are designated 'growth areas'), while local planning decisions are often seen by farmers as largely restrictive and not meeting the need to diversify out of mainstream farming. Employment costs are high and are combined with the difficulty of finding - and housing - farm staff. Land prices of land are also high, exacerbated within the region by its amenity value.

Near urban farming (the London fringes especially, but around any conurbation in the South East) is subject to unique pressure and on occasions destructive access; however it does provide a potential near market of many millions in the population and an opportunity to educate. The South East experiences large numbers of visitors, both long stay, and those just passing through to the major south coast ports, as well as the Channel Tunnel, plus Gatwick and Heathrow airports. This creates an opportunity for farmers to forge links, share experiences and promote the South East as a tourist destination. Recreation and leisure is increasingly important and expenditure on day visits to the countryside exceeds farming's contribution to regional GDP by a factor of eight[4].

2.4.3 Land use and farming sectors

Farming in the South East remains a major land use, with 23% of the population living in the rural areas of the region and although this sector has declined as in other regions. Farming is still the dominant land use in the region, accounting for 62% of the land area (1.14 million hectares). Crops and fallow equate to 46%, permanent grassland 28% and woodland covers 15% of the RegionError! Bookmark not defined.. Farms in the region have become more specialized, with fewer, larger enterprises and have moved away from the traditional small mixed farm once typical of the region. As a consequence the patchwork landscape associated with East & West Sussex, Surrey, Kent and the Isle of Wight. has been lost to a certain extent.

The South East is still a heavily wooded region (Kent, Sussex and Surrey are among the most wooded counties in England) and much of this woodland is found on farms and currently unmanaged. This provides both an environmental 'dead weight' and an opportunity to produce biomass for heat and power but it does need more impetus.

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[4] RAC Environmental and Agricultural Features and Trends in the South East

Arable crops are grown mainly in West Sussex, Oxfordshire, Hampshire and Kent. The region can be a difficult area for growing crops due to poor conditions for establishment and harvest; either very dry or very wet. As a response there has been a movement by farmers in the region towards more technology driven farming methods ('precision farming') and more non inversion tillage driven by need to conserve soil moisture soil organic matter, timeliness and fuel costs. There is also a need for farms to become more self sufficient in terms of energy and resources due to increased fluctuation in fuel and commodity prices and resources.

The dairy and livestock sector is now mainly in Buckinghamshire, East & West Sussex and Hampshire. It is under pressure to comply with NVZ regulation, and the lack of finance to make the capital investment needed is contracting the already very small dairy sector, while remaining herds increase in size. There is a lack of other livestock for grazing high value habitats and landscapes in the face of poor economics, movement restrictions, potential disease, and animal welfare, environmental and waste legislation; however some areas have unique local grazing management systems such as in the New Forest and Ashdown Forest. There is a risk that livestock in the region may be subject to an increased disease risk, such as bluetongue due to milder winters; this would also affect the level of crop disease.

The horticulture sector within the region, (mainly found in Kent and Sussex) has more opportunities yet faces more pressures and difficulties than any other sector. There is the threat of water shortages during dry summers plus a demand to manage large volumes of water in rainfall events, and harvest / store to re-use. Near market industry rewards quality production, while requiring the sector to comply with assurance schemes with environmental measures, yet is the sector that is least able or likely to contract into Environmental Stewardship. An example of this is the continued pressure to abandon / remove traditional orchards due to lack of investment, grant support and poor economics. There is also conflict between fruit and vegetable growers and local communities over the landscape impact of polytunnels and soil runoff.

The equine industry, widespread in SE, with concentrations in the London fringes, Surrey and the horse racing industry in Berkshire, contributes heavily to the rural economy and is a major amenity land use, but has a poor land management image and often falls outside the incentive/regulation system.

67% of farm businesses in the South East have diversified, as against 78% for Kent and 46% for England: diversification mostly comprises the processing and retailing of produce, tourism and letting buildings for businesses.

2.4.4 Designated areas

The South East has many national and international status wildlife sites, plus heritage sites, green belt, AONBs, and National Parks in Sussex and Hants (see box). At the same time, management of the sites within these designations is becoming a larger part of the farm business through Stewardship and assurance schemes.

5 ESAs: South Downs; Test Valley; Avon Valley; North Kent Marshes and Upper Thames Tributaries
684 Sites of Special Scientific Interest covering 139,438 ha.
36 NNRs covering 7,878 ha
90 Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas for Conservation (SACs) covering 89,119 ha
9 AONBs fully within the region and 3 partly - approximately one third of the region is designated as AONB.
2,500 SAMs and 4 World Heritage Sites (buildings)

Farming background – Kent area

2.5.1 Overview

The report 'The agricultural sector and rural businesses in Kent - An assessment of their value to the Kent economy' published by Kent County Council in 2009, has a useful analysis of farming types, employment and economic value. However it only covers the Kent County Council area, so while it includes Gravesham it excludes Medway, so cannot be drawn on to analyse the whole study area. However its findings are worth comment in relation to the specific role of horticulture the study area in areas such as employment and GVA (Gross Value Added).

Where referred to below, <<Kent>> = Kent County Council area, <<the report>> = *The agricultural sector and rural businesses in Kent* report.

2.5.2 Employment

Horticulture is an important part of the study area as a land use, source of employment and a specific produce type. The report also considers it to be a very specific sub-sector within agriculture. It cannot separately identify those employed in horticulture due to the aggregated way the data is published and the fact that many farm holdings are of mixed use. The DEFRA Annual Business Inquiry identified 1,600 people employed in Kent horticulture in 2007 but this dataset contributes only a small proportion of the total number employed in agriculture, so this only represents a tiny proportion of the horticultural sector.

Employment in the whole Kent agricultural sector (including full, part-time, and seasonal staff at a single time point, but not the self employed) is 2.3% of the total Kent workforce, compared to 1.1% regionally and 0.9% nationally. According to the June survey, Medway and Gravesham employ some 300 casual workers alone, these are likely to mainly work in horticulture. The higher than national/regional average employment in agriculture for Kent is likely to be reflected in the study area therefore. See further in section [2.6.13].

2.5.3 GVA

From the report:
GVA is the difference between output and intermediate consumption for any given sector/industry. That is the difference between the value of goods and services produced and the cost of raw materials and other inputs which are used up in production. GVA is now the Office for National Statistics (ONS) preferred measure of economic output.

The report estimated that there were 2,200 agricultural businesses in Kent, farming almost 235,500 hectares. The GVA figure for these businesses is £238m, or 1.1% of the total GVA in Kent. While not possible to calculate a specific GVA for Kent for horticulture, the report says anecdotal evidence suggests that horticulture is a higher value-added sector than the average for the agricultural industry, so would provide a proportionally higher level of output per employee.

2.5.4 Food chain GVA

From the report;
The concept of the food chain is to capture those industries that make it possible to get food from the land to your plate. Agriculture therefore plays a key role in the food chain, which could also be described as: "a collection of various sectors of the economy that encompass the production, processing, packaging, distribution and sale of food". It is estimated that within Kent there are 85,000 people employed in food chain industries, which accounts for just over 15% of all employees in the County. Together, the value of these industries to the Kent economy is almost £2.6bn, which is around 12.4% of Kent's total GVA.

The contribution of the study area to this food chain GVA will be considerable. Even with a move of some activities away from the area and to bigger centres, its horticultural output is still the start of a *production, processing, packaging, distribution and sale of food* process of considerable value in the county economy.

2.5.5 Future trends and the role of agriculture

The report says that [its data shows] there has been a decline in the GVA of agriculture from around £275 in 2003 and forecasts this decline will continue, until it stabilises at just under £200m. As the report points out, it is not clear as to how this forecast is generated, and whether this figure includes the impacts of climate change, food security issues, and other challenges and opportunities for the agricultural sector.

From the report;
It should be noted that the predicted trend indicating a decline in agricultural employment may not address the potential effects of measures to improve food security, or the opportunities presented by non-food agriculturally-based clean technologies. As the impacts of climate change and post-peak oil economics take effect, it is likely that Kent and the UK will rely more heavily upon the domestic agricultural industry, creating new business opportunities, and mitigating a potential decline in land-based employment.
Even though recent research has shown that the UK imports just under 50% of its food (Food Statistics Pocketbook 2008, DEFRA/ONS), the agricultural sector still provides the foundation upon which the food chain is built, and in doing so, its presence supports a considerably wider section of the local economy. This is becoming increasingly important as consumers concerns over food-miles, preference for seasonal produce and the increase in buying locally, start to impact on spending patterns.

It is clear that the concerns and challenges set out above offer opportunities for Kent's agriculture as a whole, and specifically for the study area, not only with its significant horticulture sector, but also its unique marshland growing traditional beef and lamb. These are opportunities the area's farmers themselves recognise, both in their confidence levels and future plans, as will be seen in the 'farmer attitude study' section of this report.

2.6 The farming background – the Medway & Gravesham Districts

2.6.1 Overview

The Kent Rural Delivery Framework (Kent County Council, June 2007) recognises that although farming incomes and employment are diminishing, land-based industries continue to make a significant contribution to the rural economy – almost £600 million;

Activity	% farmed area in Kent	Total contribution
Horticulture	6%	£220.4 million
Arable	58%	£114.5 million
Equestrian	n/a	£100 million
Livestock	18%	£68.6 million
Woodland	11%	£10.6 million
Field Sports	n/a	£67 million

In addition to these direct economic benefits, land-based businesses produce indirect benefits. Many of the County's 'iconic' landscapes and valued wildlife habitats are the result of farming practices and traditional land management practices. Therefore, a robust and viable agriculture sector is necessary to maintain them. This resulting 'countryside capital' is also a key driver for Kent's tourism industry, the quality of life of its residents and is a prime attraction to relocating businesses and incomers.

http://www.kentruralnetwork.org.uk/kent-rural-framework

2.6.2 The farmland resource

A farmed area is the sum of many influences. On top of the given factors of soils and climate, the historic development of agriculture in turn shapes the landscape over time. Land ownership can also dictate change, or continuity. Determined by these factors and other such as the nearness of markets, and ownership for other purposes such as keeping horses, patterns of land use have developed in the Medway. With them have emerged types of farmer who have the skills to look after stock on exposed marshes, or manage hundreds of staff producing fruit and field scale vegetables. This is reflected today in the perception of the area as unique by its farmers, the pattern of land ownership, the strong affinity to the marshes, and the prominence of market linked production.

2.6.3 Soils

The following soil types are present within the Medway and Gravesham area:

- Loamy & clayey soils of costal flats with naturally high groundwater
- Saltmarsh soils
- Free draining lime-rich loamy soils
- Free draining slightly acid loamy soils
- Slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acidic but base-rich loamy & clayey soils
- Slightly acidic loamy and clayey soils impeded drainage
- Loamy soils with naturally high groundwater
- Freely draining slightly acidic but base-rich soils

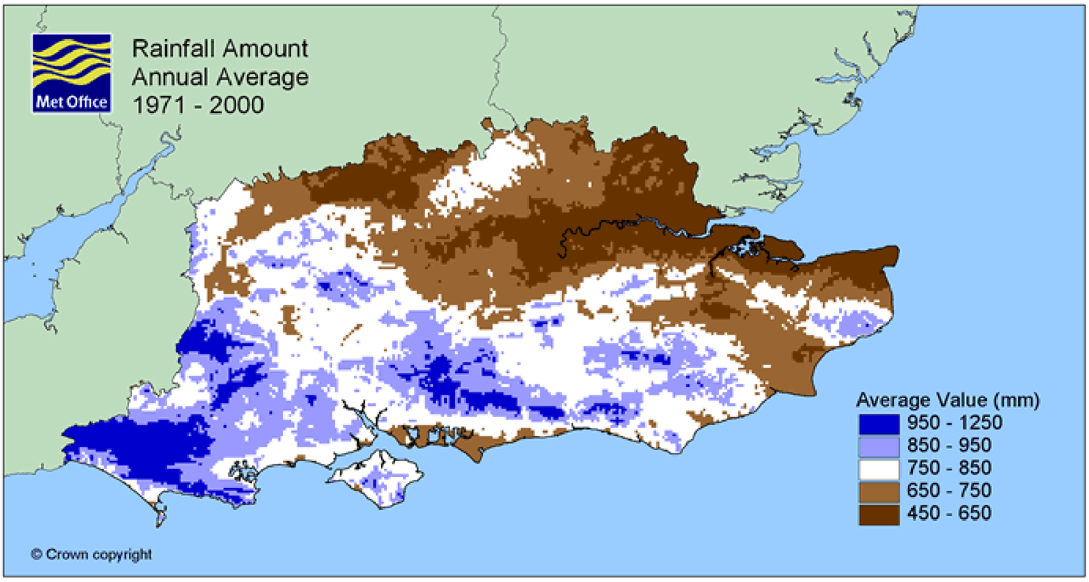
Source; Kent Lifescapes Information System (KLIS)

http://extranet7.kent.gov.uk/klis/home.htm

This variation in soil is reflected in a wide range of farmland habitats, land quality and cropping – see further below.

2.6.4 Rainfall

Northern Kent is the driest region of the UK. The average annual rainfall measured in the Medway and Gravesham area codes, taken from a thirty year average is 750mm/year.[5] But rainfall on the sandy 'upland' soils of the Hoo peninsula is some 483 mm/year. The map below shows the study area in relation to the rest of the SE.



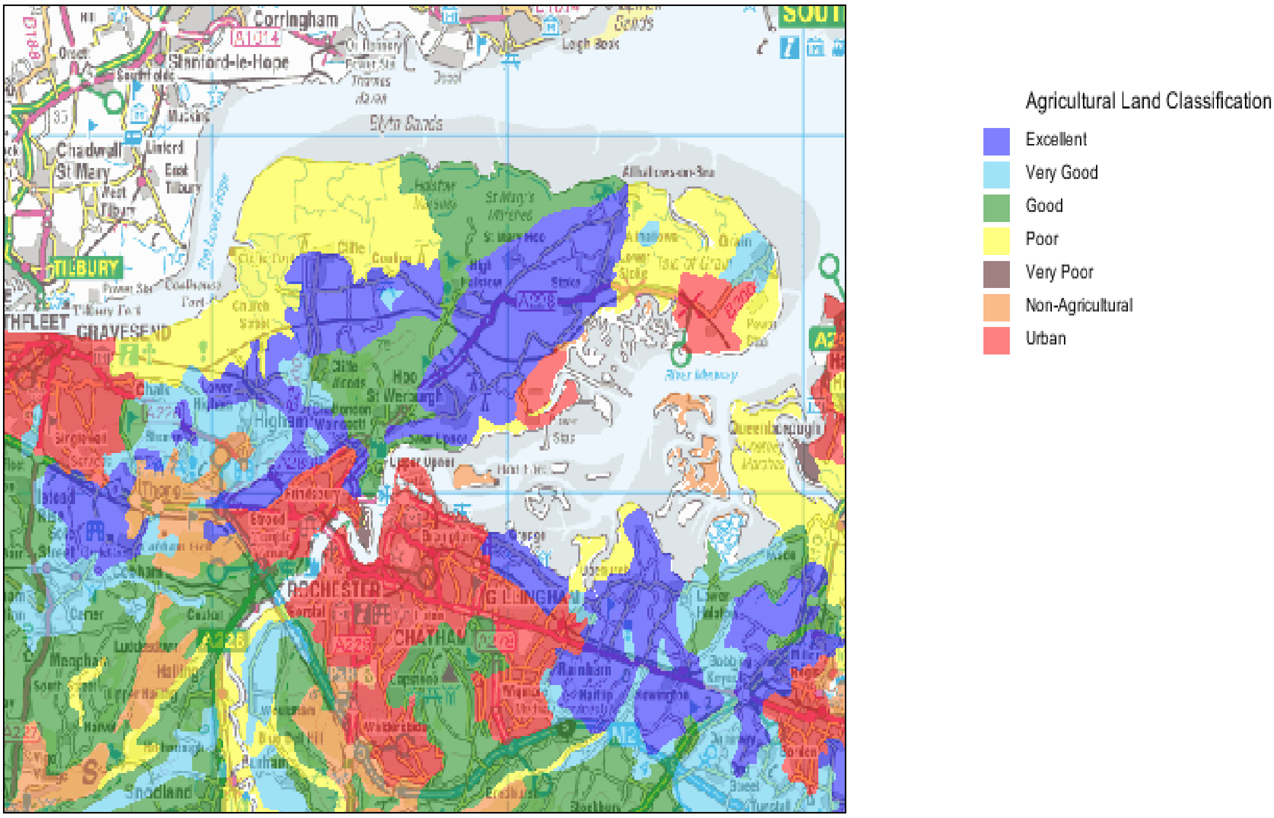
Source; Met Office

[5] Dairy Co. Cost Effective Slurry Storage Strategy on Dairy Farms

2.6.5 Agricultural Land Classification

There is a significant amount of land classed in grades 1 (excellent) and 2 (very good) of the agricultural land classification in the study area. The main area runs in a swathe from Shorne in the west of the area in a band bordered roughly by Cooling in the north and Hoo in the south, before running out at Allhallows. There is a further small block of grade 1 land at Gillingham. The marshes which are permanent pasture are predominantly classed as poor quality.

Grades 1, 2 and 3a of the agricultural land classification are classified as the best and most versatile agricultural land. National planning policy on this is contained in PPS7 and requires the presence of the best agricultural land to be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations when making planning decisions.



Source; KLIS

2.6.6 Historic Development

Corn production on the fertile brickearth soils of the North Kent Plain has been important since at least the Iron Age, and together with the development of brewing and malting from the 15th century has been stimulated by the ease of access to the London market. Large parts were owned by the Church, and the cathedrals of Rochester and Canterbury continued to manage large estates after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 16th century. Fruit growing was also a major element in its agriculture, increasing from the 17th century with the establishment of larger orchards to supply the London market and the supply of the naval dockyards. The area within the Hoo peninsula was historically dominated by arable and fruit growing, with shelterbelts to isolated farmsteads as well as blocks of coppice woodland. Most farmsteads on Hoo are isolated and set within landscapes of medium-large scale irregular fields largely enclosed by the 18th century.

Source; National Character Area statements NCA 113 (North Kent Plain) and 81 (Thames Marshes)

2.6.7 Landscape

Due to its varied geology the Medway and Gravesham area has a wide range of farmland habitats. Combined with a mixture of different farming types the landscape is both diverse within the area and unique to the county. Gravesham for example has no single habitat that represents over 5% of its total area.[6] The farmed landscape of the study area covers a range of habitats including both acidic and calcareous grassland, heathland and saltmarsh. Woodland is confined to small blocks and copses often on higher ground with acidic clay soils such as around Shorne and Chattenden.

In the Medway area the most extensive land cover is littoral sediment habitats, including mudflats, sandflats and saltmarsh, which making up 4,800 hectares.[6] There are over 2,100 hectares of neutral grassland in the Medway district, the majority of which is costal grazing marsh. Approximately 76% of the Gravesham area consists of agricultural habitats including, arable and horticultural land, woodland, and grassland. In the Medway district this figure is approximately 52%.[6]

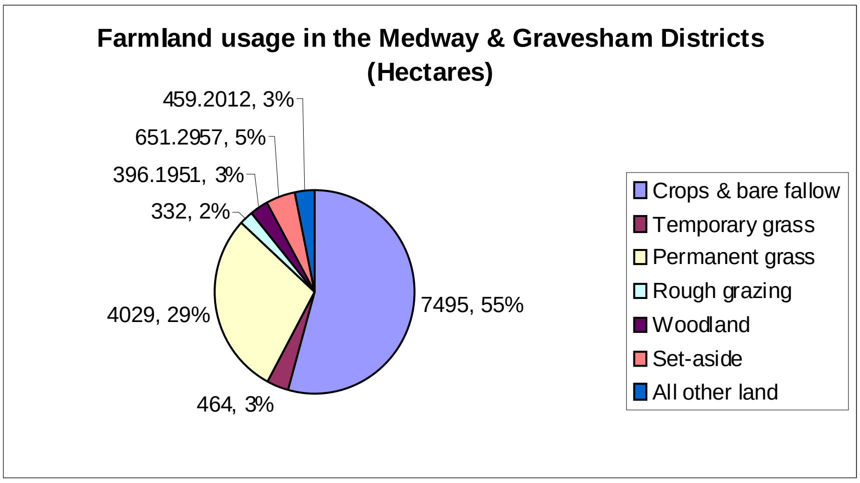
Classification of farmland habitats in Medway and Gravesham according to Kent Lifescapes Information System (K-LIS);

Agricultural Grassland Habitats	Arable Habitats	Woodland Habitats	Neutral Grassland Habitats
1400h	8400h	400h	2900h

[6] Kent Habitat Survey 2003

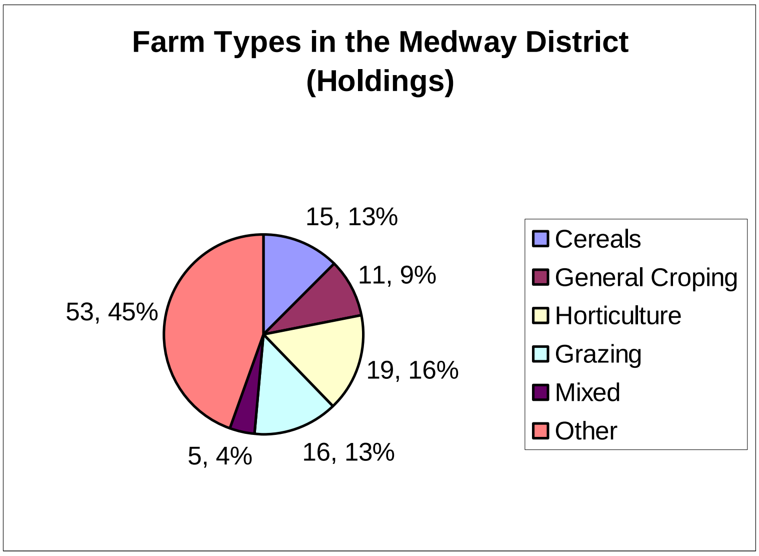
2.6.8 Farmland usage

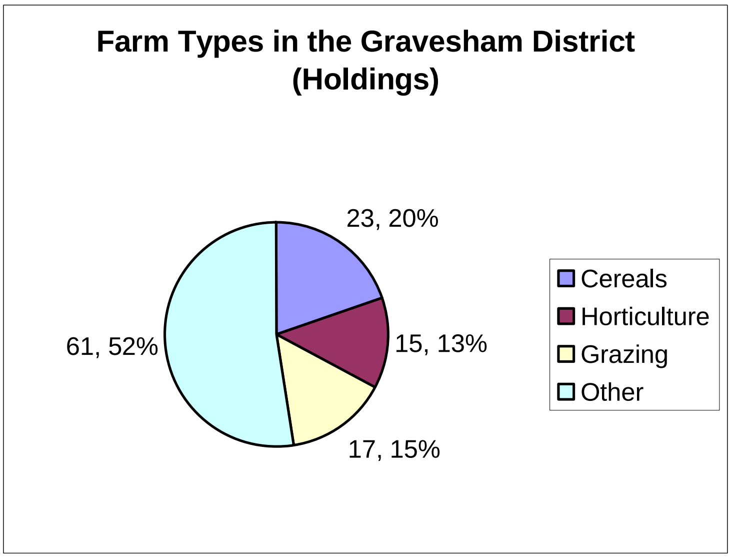
Figures used for the study in following sections of this report from the June 2007 Agricultural and Horticultural Survey are based on holdings across the whole of Medway and the Gravesham district, some of which is outside of the actual study area.



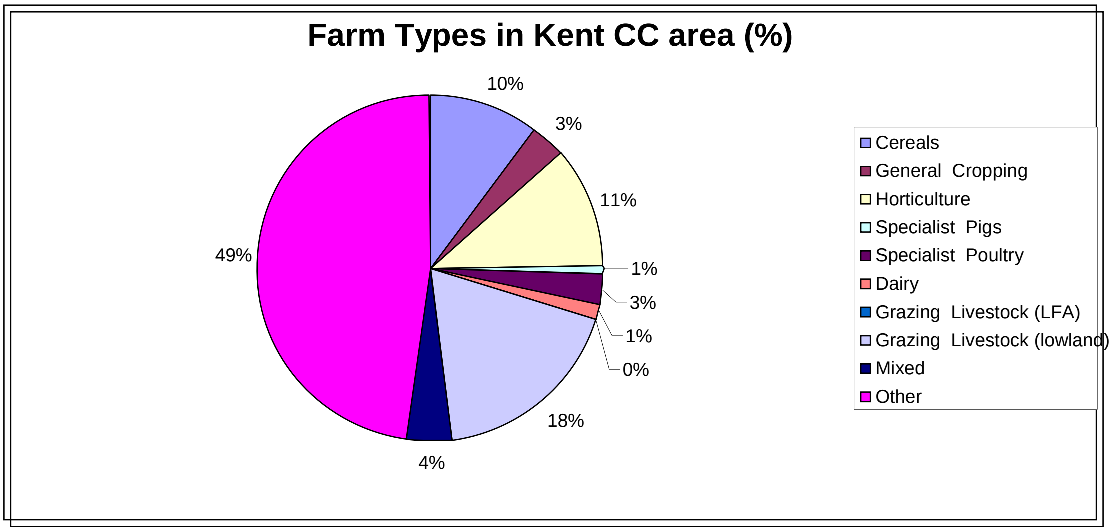
The figures for the Kent CC area in the same farmland categories are crops and bare fallow 50%, temporary grass 6%, permanent grass 30%, rough grazing 2%, woodland 6%, set aside 5% and all other land 3%. The main farmland uses in the SE region as a whole are crops and fallow (46%) and permanent grassland (28%).

There are a total of 251 holdings listed as agricultural in the Medway and Gravesham districts, making up 13,828 hectares of farmed land. Private built up areas and gardens make up 8022 ha.



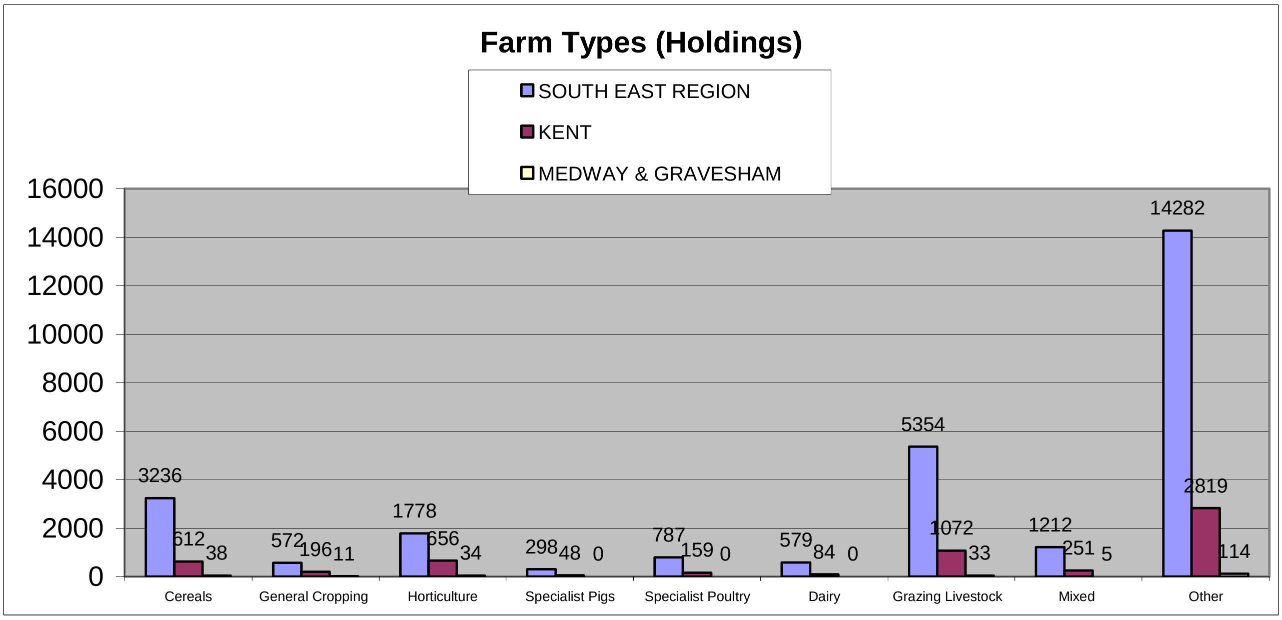


The figures for the Kent CC area in the same farm types categories are cereals 10%, general cropping 3%, mixed 4%, horticulture 11%, grazing 18% and other 49%.
In the SE region as a whole, the main farm types are grazing (23%) and cereal farms (14%), with horticulture 9%, and 37% of all holdings classified as "other".



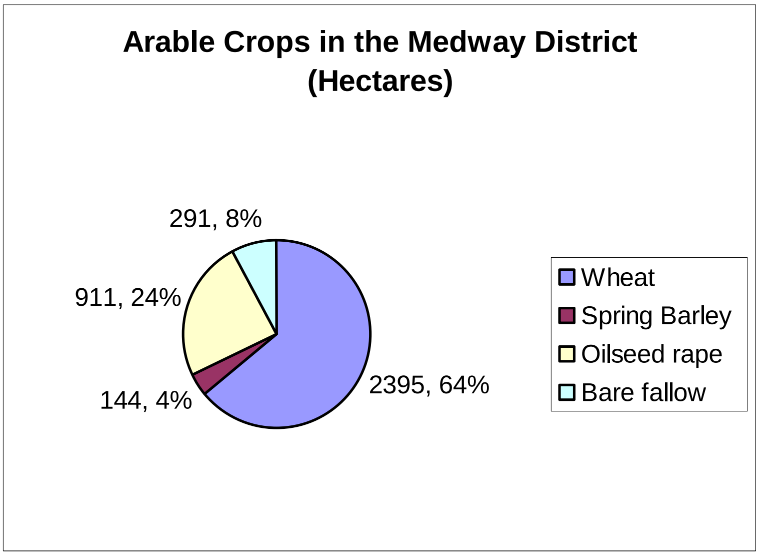
All farm types are well represented in the study area, except specialist pigs and poultry, and dairy.

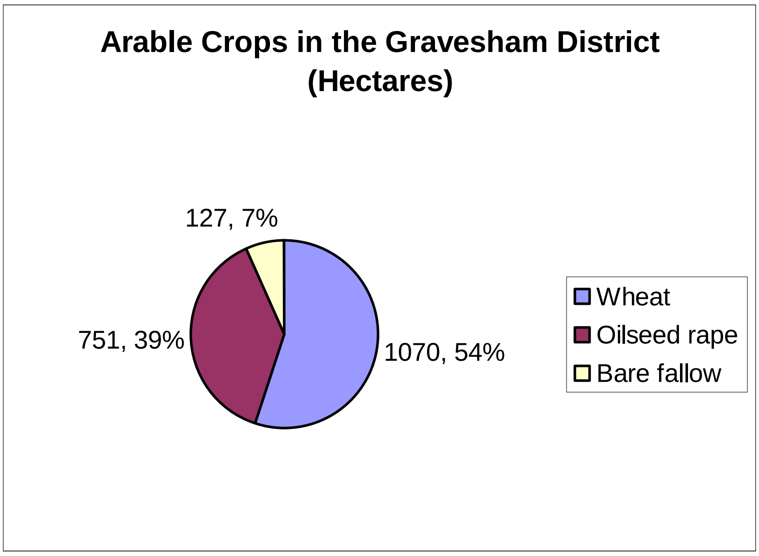
According to the June Survey, 36 holdings have horses. Holdings taking part in the survey are more likely to be those keeping horses as commercial enterprises, with for example a livery business being run alongside the main farm business. This can be a useful profit centre in its own right, in support of 'mainstream' farm income, and provide employment to family members in the business, as is the case in one of the individual farms interviewed. Equally there is a large element of non farming horse owners in the study area, prepared and able to buy land to keep them on. 'Horsiculture' of any kind raises landscape issues, with the choice of fencing, stabling and management (or lack of) of land being typical concerns. In planning terms, keeping of horses on previously agricultural land can be classed as change of use and therefore made subject to restrictions.

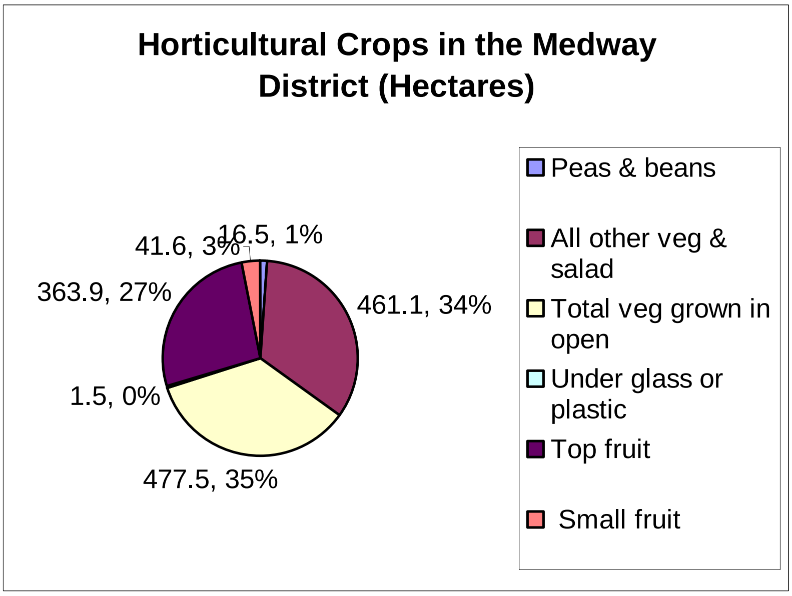


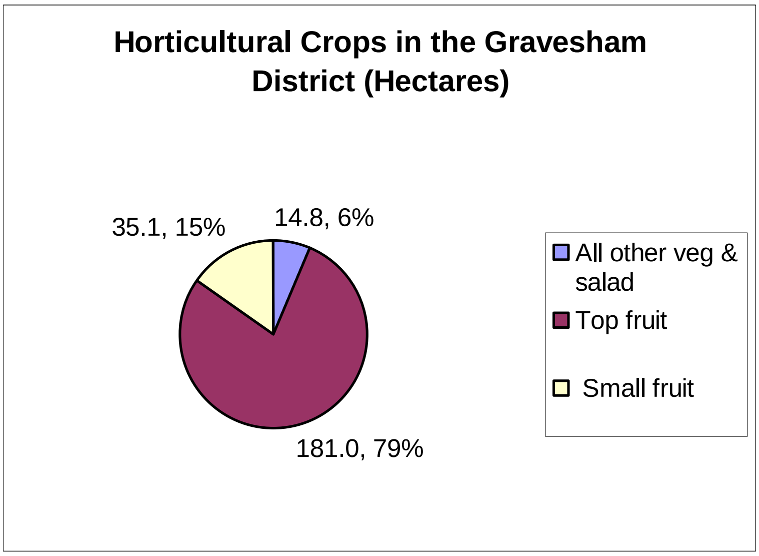
Arable & Horticulture:

A wide range of horticultural crops is grown, accounting for nearly 20% of Medway and over 15% of Gravesham farm types. Wheat and oilseed rape are the majority arable crops.




Arable Crops in the Gravesham District (Hectares)
127, 7%
751, 39%
1070, 54%
Wheat
Oilseed rape
Bare fallow


Horticultural Crops in the Medway District (Hectares)
41.6, 3%
16.5, 1%
363.9, 27%
461.1, 34%
1.5, 0%
477.5, 35%
Peas & beans
All other veg & salad
Total veg grown in open
Under glass or plastic
Top fruit
Small fruit

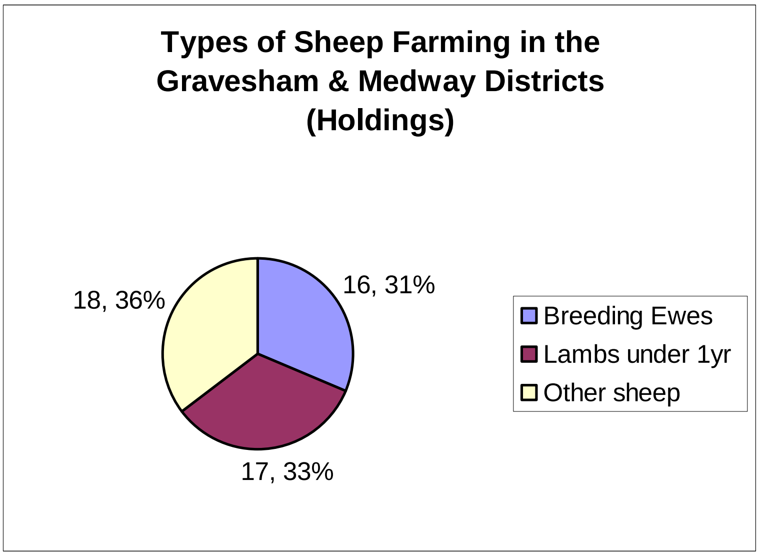

Horticultural Crops in the Gravesham District (Hectares)
35.1, 15%
14.8, 6%
181.0, 79%
All other veg & salad
Top fruit
Small fruit

In the Medway district there are seven holdings growing vegetable crops under glass or plastic, which equates to a total of 1.5 hectares. The remaining fifteen holdings where vegetables are grown make up 477.5 hectares of vegetables grown in the open air.

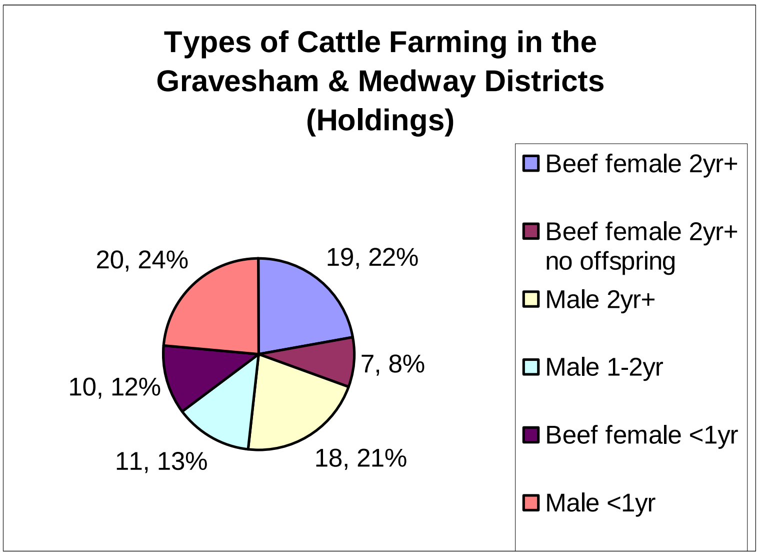
The figures for the Kent CC area in the same horticultural crops categories are peas and beans 4%, all other vegetables and salads 19%, total vegetables grown in open 23%, under glass and plastic 0.7%, top fruit 61% and small fruit 12%.

Livestock:

Holdings with breeding ewes and female beef cattle are the most common (reflecting the pastoral farming on the marshes). Dairy farming is a notably absent sector in the study area. The loss of the last 2 dairy farms from the area within the last 15 years reflects the national trend.



The figures for the Kent CC area in the same sheep farming categories are breeding ewes 47%, lambs under 1 year 49%, other sheep 4%.



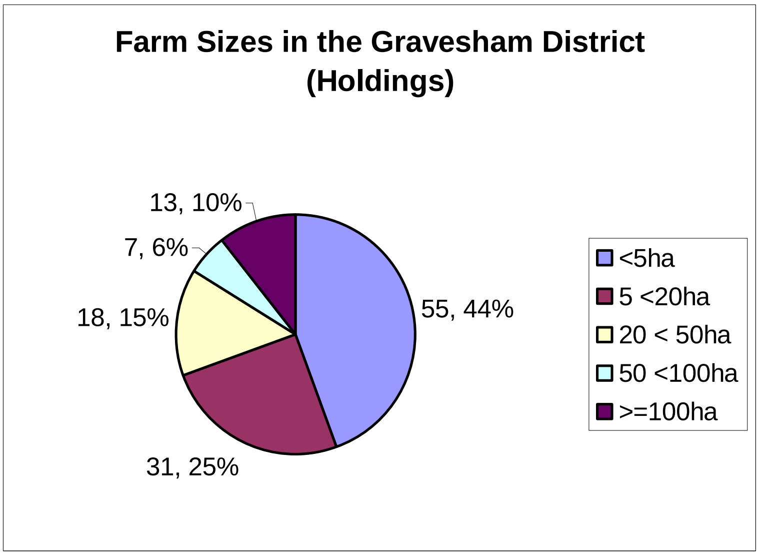
Other livestock:

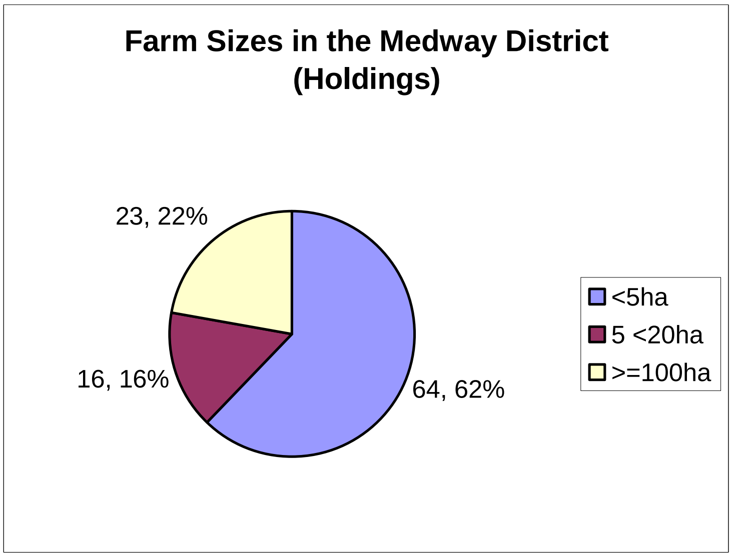
	GOATS		HORSES		POULTRY						PIGS	
	Total Goats		Total Horses		Total layers		Geese		Total Poultry		Total Pigs	
	[Number]	[Holdings]	[Number]	[Holdings]	[Number]	[Holdings]	[Number]	[Holdings]	[Number]	[Holdings]	[Number]	[Holdings]
Medway	45	6	237	26	#	#	47	7	1922	14	399	5
Gravesham	19	6	278	36	202	8	12	5	228	12	0	0

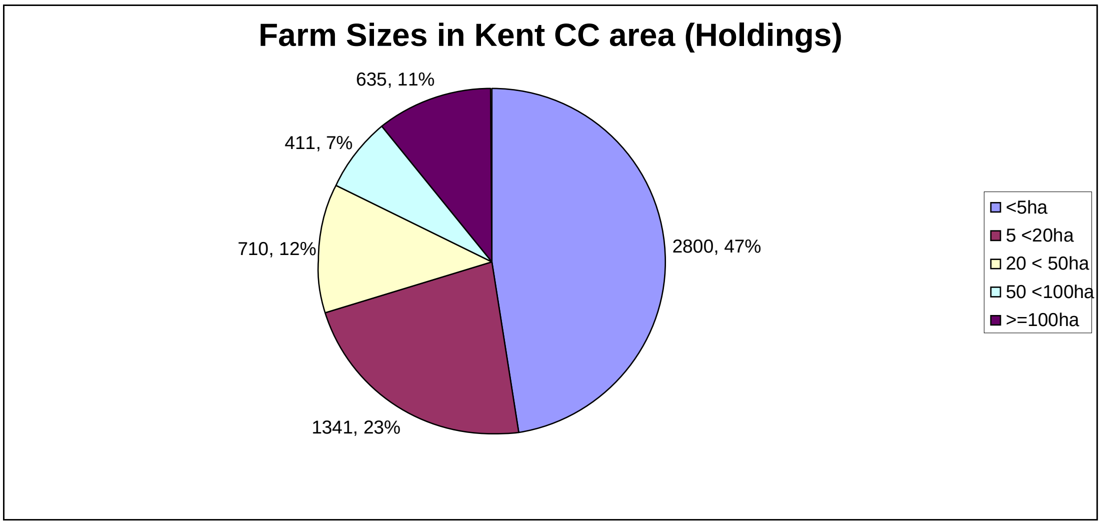
(# - Suppressed to prevent disclosure of information about individual holdings)

2.6.9 Farm Size

The majority of registered holdings in Gravesham and Medway are less than 5 ha, similar to the dominance in this category in both Kent and the SE region. Conversely, 22% of holdings in Medway are over 100ha (compared with the Kent figure of 11% and the SE region figure of 15%).






Farm Sizes in Kent CC area (Holdings)
635, 11%
411, 7%
710, 12%
2800, 47%
1341, 23%
<5ha
5 <20ha
20 < 50ha
50 <100ha
>=100ha

2.6.10 Land ownership

Institutional landowners have some significant holdings in the study area.

The Church Commissioners Rochester Estate is 2333 ha held by 20 agricultural tenants. The holdings vary from large fully equipped farms to small areas of bare land held on Farm Business Tenancies (FBT). Some of the individual holdings are large; the two largest are 372 ha and 359 ha, but some farmers rent individual farms plus FBT land, so making up sizeable portfolios of land this way. The land varies from high quality soils with intensive vegetable production, to large blocks of permanent pasture grazing marsh. The Commissioners are encouraging of their tenants to go into the Environmental Stewardship schemes (Entry Level, and Higher Level Stewardship on the marshes, much of which has been in Environmentally Sensitive Area agreements for some time).

Source; Strutt & Parker

St Johns College owns about 634.5 ha split between 9 holdings, a few of which are very small, but most over 80 ha. Almost all are on grade 1 or 2 land and let to longstanding agricultural tenants.

Source; Sheils Flynn / George Webb Finn

These large holdings no doubt contribute to the high level of rented land in the Gravesham / Medway area, where a majority of land is rented (8911 ha compared with 5852 ha owned). In comparison the Kent CC area split between rented and owned land is roughly 31% to 69%.

The Rochester Bridge Trust holdings amount to about 153 ha of bare land split between 3 holdings and let under various tenancy, sporting and MoD licences.
Source; Smiths Gore

The Sir Joseph Williamsons Mathematical School Trust has 2 holdings in the area totalling about 117 ha.

Source; Bax Thomas French

Other institutions with land include the Colyer Ferguson Trust, the Crown, London Ports Authority, Lafarge Cement and the MOD. The Kent Wildfowling and Conservation Association own and lease about 648 ha of coastal land in north Kent, mostly in the Medway. Kent Wildlife Trust and RSPB also own land in the study area.

2.6.11 Land prices

The study area has a wide range of land types and their values depend on their productive potential. In simple terms, Grade 1 land capable of growing fresh produce will clearly have a higher value than grade 4 land on the marshes suited only to stock rearing. However other factors can dictate land uses and consequently values. In the era of agricultural expansion for example much marshland capable of being ploughed was converted to arable production, pushing up its value. The introduction of the counter incentive of the ESA coupled with declining returns has swung the balance the other way since the early 80ies. The closeness of the study area to London, and presence of urban areas within it, overlays the less remote areas with residential and investment values. Land for horse paddocks can reach more on the open market than what would otherwise be its agricultural value only. Desirability of land acquisition for uses such as nature conservation, or with the aim of preventing an unwelcome development, can also skew normal values. Finally farmers themselves take opportunities to buy land when it comes available and fits the development - or survival – of the business, for example when a neighbour retires. This has been cited by our individual farmer interviewees, and in these circumstances competition for land can be fierce.

Guideline values of agricultural land in the area (i.e. farming not residential or other values) in £/acre;

Upland producing field scale vegetables	£5000 - £5500
Arable land producing combinable crops	£5500 - £6000
Arable marshland	£3000 - £3500
ESA marshland	£2500 - £3000
Land in the Downs, south of the A2	£4500 - £5000

Source; Bax Thomas French

2.6.12 Farming and landowning representation

The National farmers Union (NFU) Rochester Branch has its office at Meopham, and covers the whole study area. Currently it has 50-160 Branch members representing 63 farming businesses in the area.

Source; NFU

The Country Land and Business association (CLA) has 28 members in the area.

Source; CLA

2.6.13 Farm Labour

Agriculture in Gravesham employs 1.9% of the total Gravesham workforce which is above the regional (1.1%) and national (0.9%) averages.

Source; Gravesham District Council

Comparable data have not been found for Medway. Definitions of sector employment vary and confuse the issue;

- For the county of Kent (from the 2001 census) 3.3% employed in agriculture forestry and hunting
- For Medway 2.2% in 'land based industries' (inc forestry, equine, animal care, floristry) out of 84,000 jobs (Learning Skills Council Medway 2002)

- For Medway 1.9% in the primary sector (changing natural resources into primary products; mining fishing forestry agriculture) (Medway Sustainability Appraisal final scoping report 2009)

The employed labour figures in the June Survey data (see table at end of section) are of interest, as responses to the questionnaires gathered in the farmer survey part of the study suggest higher figures, even without those employed in diversified activities such as packing. One respondent to reported employing 200 casuals, while with the total June Survey figure for Medway and Gravesham is given as 300.

Sources of labour in the area are a mix of 'traditional' local employment and 'new' overseas (mainly E European) workers. The former tend to provide the longer term, full time labour, while the latter are more seasonal and short term. Two farmers interviewed individually reported recruitment from the ethnic (Asian) community in the Medway towns (one commenting that such workers are among the few prepared to do outdoor winter work). A third has long term local employees, often extended family and through several generations. These long standing systems have worked well, employed relatively large numbers of local people, and clearly have an added social dimension of town-country connection which is now largely lost in other rural areas, with much lower labour needs.

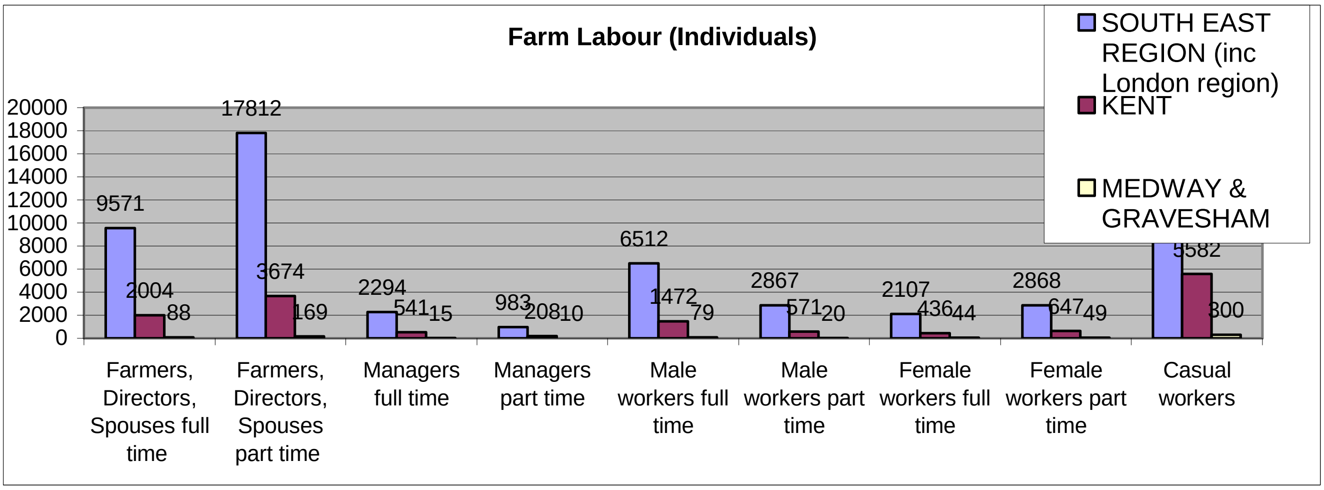
While no farmer interviewee reported a problem getting workers, its high and specific labour needs are a concern for the study area. Two interviewees anticipate a shortage in skilled workers. Horticultural crops need a large labour force at critical times such as harvest, with delay being costly or risking loss of a contract. With fewer people living locally wanting to do farm work, the recruitment of temporary E European workers has been vital, especially for summer harvesting. The number allowed to enter UK however has been subject to restrictions imposed through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS). Recently, as the EU has expanded, the typical countries of origin such as Poland and Bulgaria have come into the EU, offering wider opportunities for work than the UK and reducing applications. For reasons of difficulty finding labour alone, many growers have given up in the last 20 years.

2.6.14 Summary

The study area has a number of characteristics which mark it out from Kent and the rest of the SE region. These will inform the later analysis section of this report, and are worth summarising at this stage;

- High quality land
- Low rainfall
- Variety of soils, landscape and habitat
- Large institutional landowner sector
- Majority rented land
- High proportion farms > 100ha (Medway)
- Wide range of land prices
- Non farming land owners
- Near market position
- High proportion cereals and horticulture
- High proportion field scale vegetables in horticulture (Medway)

- Lack of dairy, pig and poultry sectors
- Important equine sector
- High labour requirement in horticulture
- Local employment – social dimension



2.7 Land designations in the study area

2.7.1 Designations

Designations affect farmers in the study area in different ways. The ESA has turned the negative compensation for profit forgone approach of previous SSSI management agreements into a positive incentive scheme that many farmers in the area have adopted and succeeded in.

Much of the coastal habitat in the study area in the ESA is designated as Special Protection Area (SPA) under the Habitats Directive (79/409/EEC). Britain is also a signatory of the RAMSAR Convention to protect areas that are particularly important for migrating wildfowl. Together these areas are collectively known as 'Natura 2000' sites and form part of an overall network across Europe of areas important for their conservation importance.

There are a number of areas where SPA are overlaid by Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) designations. The North Kent Marshes Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) gave the impetus to the agri-environment scheme which promoted traditional management of the marshland SSSI complex, and is now being replaced by Environmental Stewardship. Other SSSI in the area include woodlands at Thong, Cliffe and High Halstow, the Downs scarp at Halling and around Cobham Park.

Other sites designated as Local Wildlife Sites identify sites of local conservation value, and while they are non statutory can be a focus for advice and grant to landowners. They are generally recognised by local authorities and given protection through policies in local development plans.

2.7.2 Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, agriculture and planning

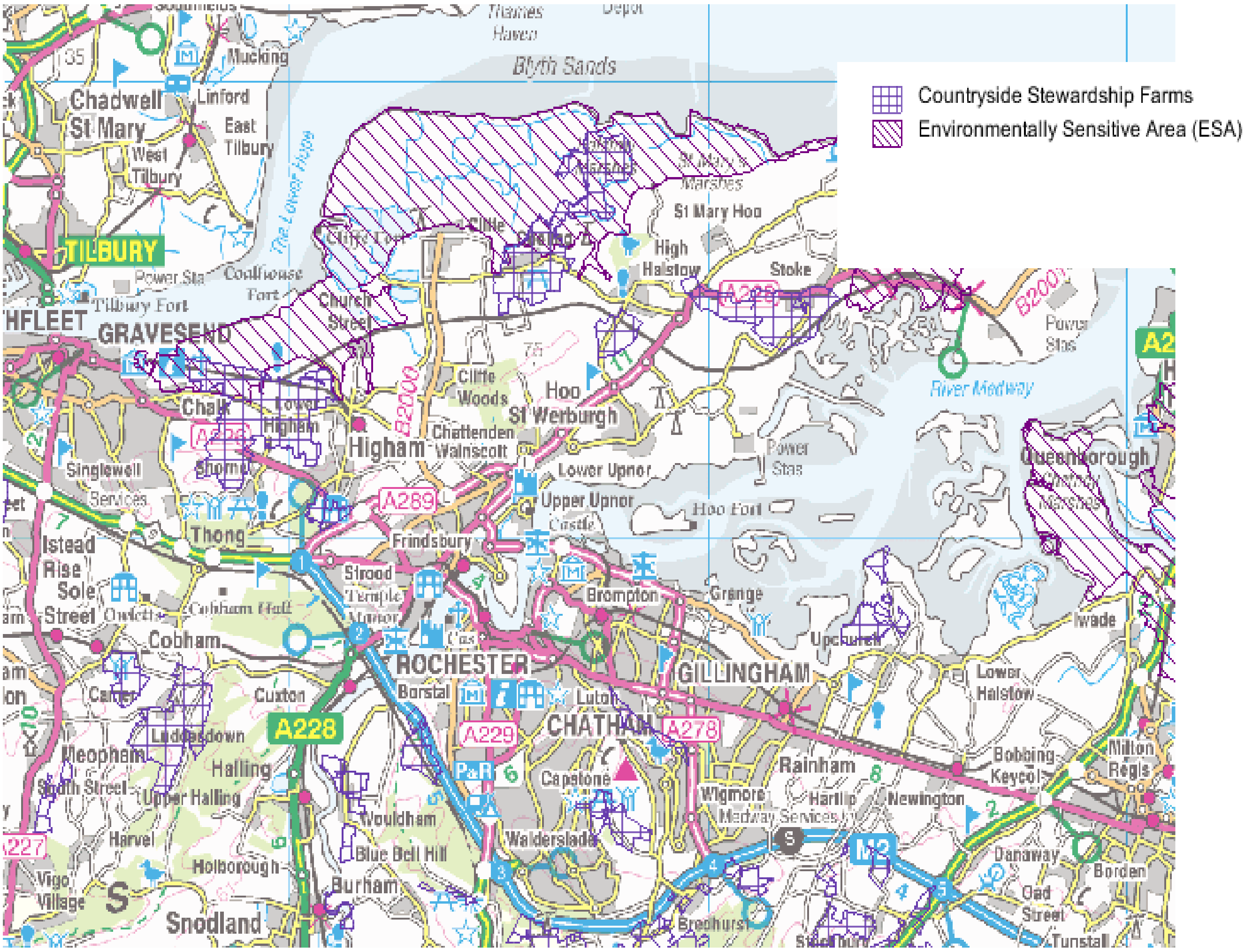
The Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) comes into the study area mainly at Thong and in the Medway valley at Halling.

Under the 'duty of regard' there is a statutory duty for all public bodies, statutory undertakers and relevant authorities 'to have regard' to the purposes of the AONB in all its functions. Within the AONB the planning legislation that applies to agriculture comes under additional scrutiny for its fit with the objectives of safeguarding the landscape of the Downs. Generally, the use of land for agricultural operations and the use of existing buildings on agricultural land for agricultural purposes do not require planning permission. Certain new agricultural buildings can be erected under permitted development rights but the local authority's prior approval in relation to certain details is required. The change of use of land or buildings from agricultural use requires planning permission.

2.7.3 Take up of agri-environment schemes

Fruit farming and field scale vegetables are not easy to fit into Environmental Stewardship and there is less take up compared with arable and livestock areas. The study area shares some of the characteristics of near urban areas around London of small and non-farming landowners who also have a low take up of ELS, even if eligible.

Out of the 'classic' agri-environment schemes, ESA agreements are centred on the north and east of the study area at Shorne, Cliffe, Cooling, Halstow, St Marys and Allhallows marshes, while there are CSS agreements at Higham, Shorne, Cooling and Stoke (see map, below).



Source; KLIS

Out of the newer Environmental Stewardship schemes, there are some ELS+HLS agreements on smaller 'inland' areas in the east of the study area from Cooling to Lower Higham, and also in the Medway valley Cuxton-Halling area. Comparing this with the area under ESA agreements, therefore, a number of outstanding marshland ESA agreements could be targeted to renew into Entry plus Higher Level Stewardship.

There are ELS only agreements on St Marys Marshes, at Allhallows, south and east of Hoo, and north of the A228 from High Halstow through to Thong. ELS agreements cover 40% of the utilisable agricultural are (UAA) of Kent, compared with 63% for the SE region and against a target of 65%. There is therefore considerable ground to make up at a county level to reach the Entry Level Stewardship target for 65% of UAA, and non ELS participating holdings in the study area could be targeted.

3. ATTITUDE STUDY

3.1 Farmer meeting

A morning meeting 'Profit from your Environment' for farmers and land managers in Medway and Gravesham was held at Cobham Hall on 9th December 2009.

3.1.1 Aim of meeting, organisation, attendance

The aim was to encourage good attendance by putting forward an attractive range of topics, with the knowledge that farmers have limited time and receive many invitations to events. See Appendix [3] for invitation letter and Appendix [4] for flyer.

The Rochester NFU branch was contacted and sent the invitation to the meeting to its membership, which covers the whole study area. The invitations were supplied ready to post and then forwarded to the NFU and posted to their members list. Some additional invitations were sent through FWAG. In total some 150 were sent, all of these also included the questionnaire. An announcement was made at Canterbury Farmers Club, a forum holding monthly evening meetings and which covers the study area.

On the day 18 farmers attended and 11 others including speakers and representatives from Medway and Gravesham Borough Councils. The attendance reflected farming locally in being well distributed across the area, and representing arable, vegetable, livestock and fruit producers, owners and tenants.

3.1.2 Programme

Speaker presentations highlighted environmental and diversification opportunities for farm businesses in the area. These were;

Funding for land management - local priorities for Environmental Stewardship	Charles Chantler Natural England
Diversifying the farm business – LEADER funding for rural businesses in the area	Huw Jarvis Kent Downs & Marshes LEADER
Planning for change – the Farm Diversification Toolkit	Jenny Bate Kent Integrated Rural Advice Service
Practical diversification experiences	William Alexander Castle Farm, Shoreham
Opportunities for farmers in the 'green gate'	Martin Hall, Director Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway
Having your say on local strategies / Introduction to discussion	Kevin Attwood, Chairman Kent NFU

See Appendix [5] for full programme details. The presentations are included in the CD copy of the study report.

A participative discussion followed the speaker session, aimed at bringing out issues that affect farm businesses, the future of farming, and engagement with plans and policies in the area. See Appendix [6] for notes taken of the discussion.

3.1.3 Analysis of discussion session

The session ranged over 4 main topic areas, farmers' interaction with policy making, farm business plans, the future of farming and urban fringe issues. Key issues that emerged:

Farmers and policy making;

- LAs recognise they have not always acknowledged farmers well in the past.
- LAs are committed to open dialogue, better understanding and support.
- Responses to Core Strategy consultations are sought.
- It has not always been easy to contact farmers for their views.
- Many do not want to be consulted, or leave it to their representatives.
- Meetings can be problematic, the internet offers a way to keep in touch.

Farm business plans;

- Farmers will have a plan, though it may not be formal.
- More likely to have a formal plan where required by e.g. a supermarket.

Future of farming;

- National and EU rather than local level factors influence the industry.
- Confidence among farmers that food production is needed.

Urban fringe issues;

- Providing access without understanding of farming can lead to problems.
- 'Honey pot sites' can get people into the countryside, but also do not educate about farming.

3.1.4 Conclusions

The presentation sessions were well received and succeeded in putting over useful information to a client group who are placed to act on it. The speakers brought information with them on their topics participants could take away.

The discussion session had a limited success. For the reasons stated above, the meeting aimed to encourage as many to attend as possible, by having attractive topics while limiting the time commitment to half a day. Within this there was both limited time for discussion, and the farmers in the audience were fairly muted. With the NFU chairing the session, this emphasizes perhaps that it is often left to such representative bodies to comment on plans and policies.

A longer, more structured session – perhaps with breakout groups and feedback – might have encouraged more participation. However, the risk in this, of lengthening the overall meeting or changing the balance between presentation/discussion, was getting a lower attendance.

It should however be emphasised that as part of the wider consultation process and the aim of the study, the wide advertising of the meeting, the attendance of representatives of Medway and Gravesham and GGKM talking to farmers and prepared to speak/answer, was a positive sign of wanting to communicate that farmers will take away with them and pass on.   In addition, the farmer meeting results are added to in the overall study by the structured interviews, and the questionnaire results.

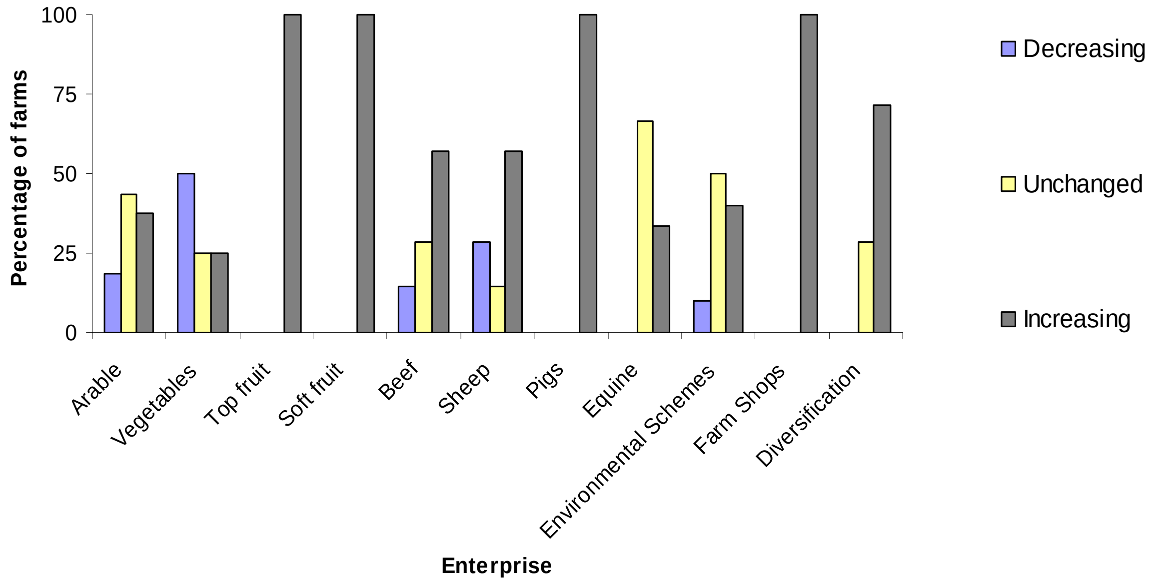
Presentation at farmer meeting

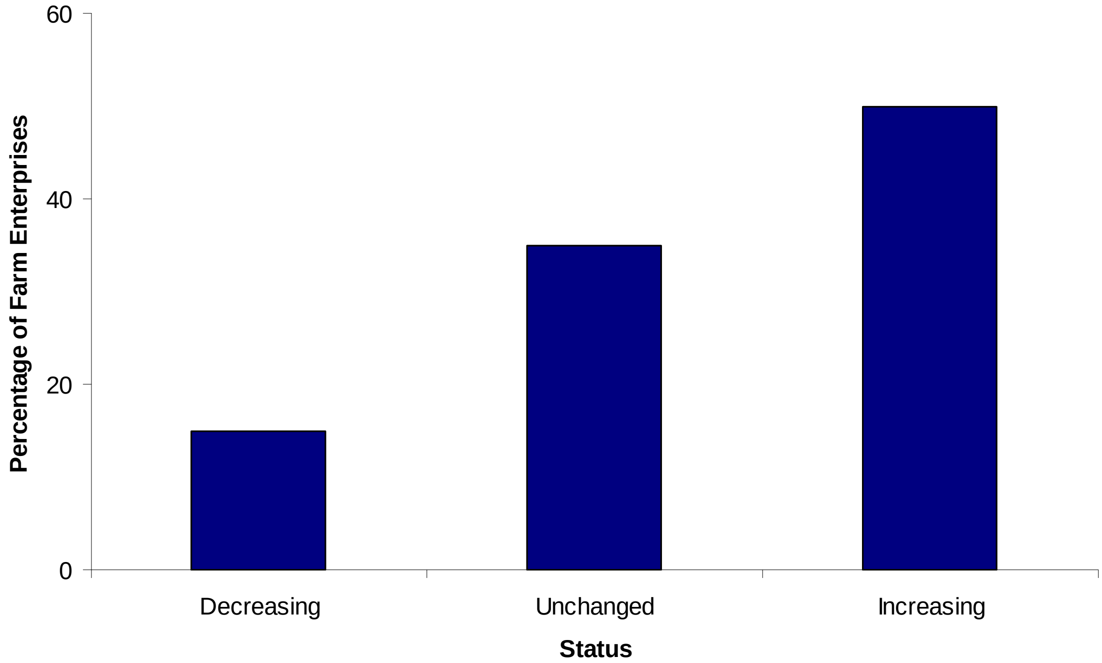
3.2 Farmer questionnaire

A two page questionnaire was sent with the invitation to the farmer meeting (i.e. to approximately150 people). Of these, 21 responses were returned, a 14% response rate. See Appendix [7] for a copy of the questionnaire.

3.2.1 Questionnaire results

What are your current enterprises and are they likely to increase in future, decrease or stay the same in the next 3-5 years? What briefly is the reason for any change?



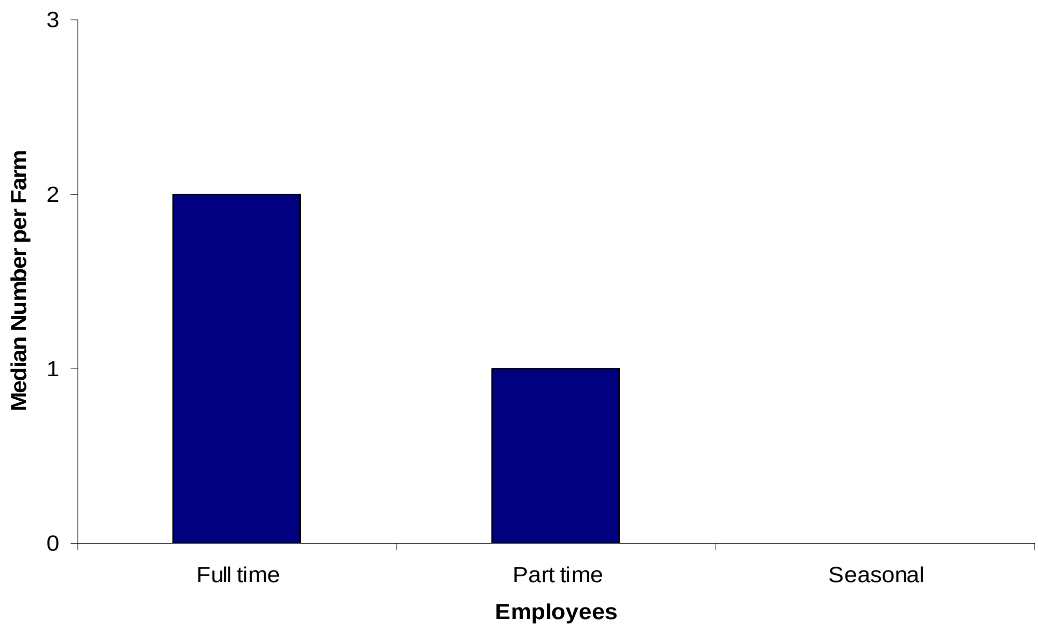


Analysis of likelihood of change by enterprise is not very useful, due to the variation in sample size (e.g. 1 fruit enterprise). However an outright majority of holdings plan no change or to increase (35% and 50%) and only 15% to decrease, and between enterprises, the only majority planning a decrease are those with vegetable production.

Reasons given for change (= increase of enterprise except where stated) were:

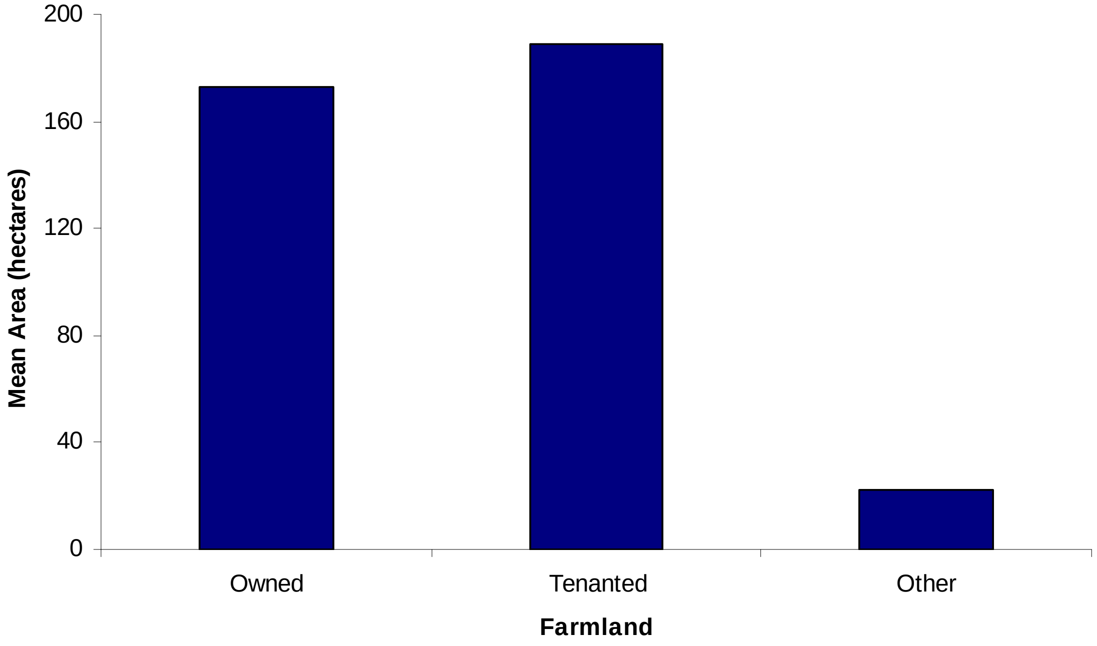
- Starting a B&B enterprise (diversification)
- More stable income source (diversification)
- Replace income from reduced sheep (diversification)
- Efficiency (arable)
- Young blood (arable)
- Spread costs (arable, vegetable)
- Taken on more land (beef, sheep)
- Family joining (beef, sheep and equine)
- Daughter's interest (equine)
- Some voluntary (environment schemes)
- New planting (top fruit)
- Lack of staff (reduced beef)
- More tree planting and soft fruit (reduced arable)
- More grass (reduced arable)
- Old shepherd (reduced sheep)
- Getting older (reduced sheep)

Numbers employed



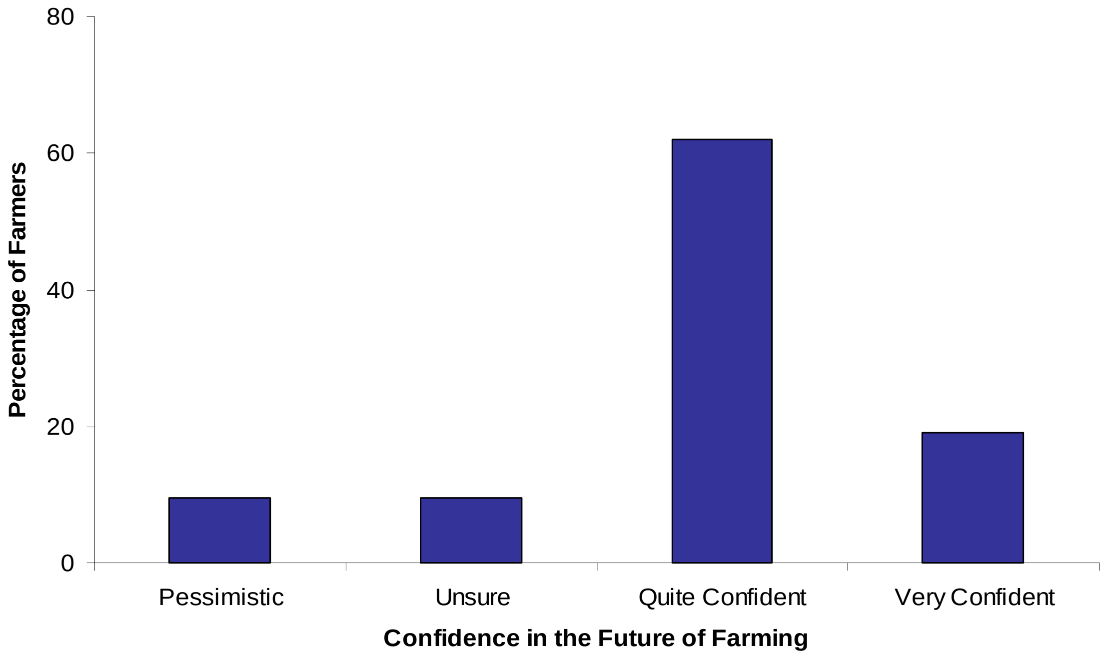
Total numbers employed by responders are 641 (203 full time, 58 part time and 380 seasonal). However the one fruit farm accounts for over half the total, and the other horticultural enterprises much of the remainder. The chart above shows the median number per farm, a much lower figure, typical of the (majority) arable based enterprises.

Farm area



The chart above shows the mean ha of land held in different ways by responders. The majority is tenanted, reflecting the pattern for Gravesham/Medway area.

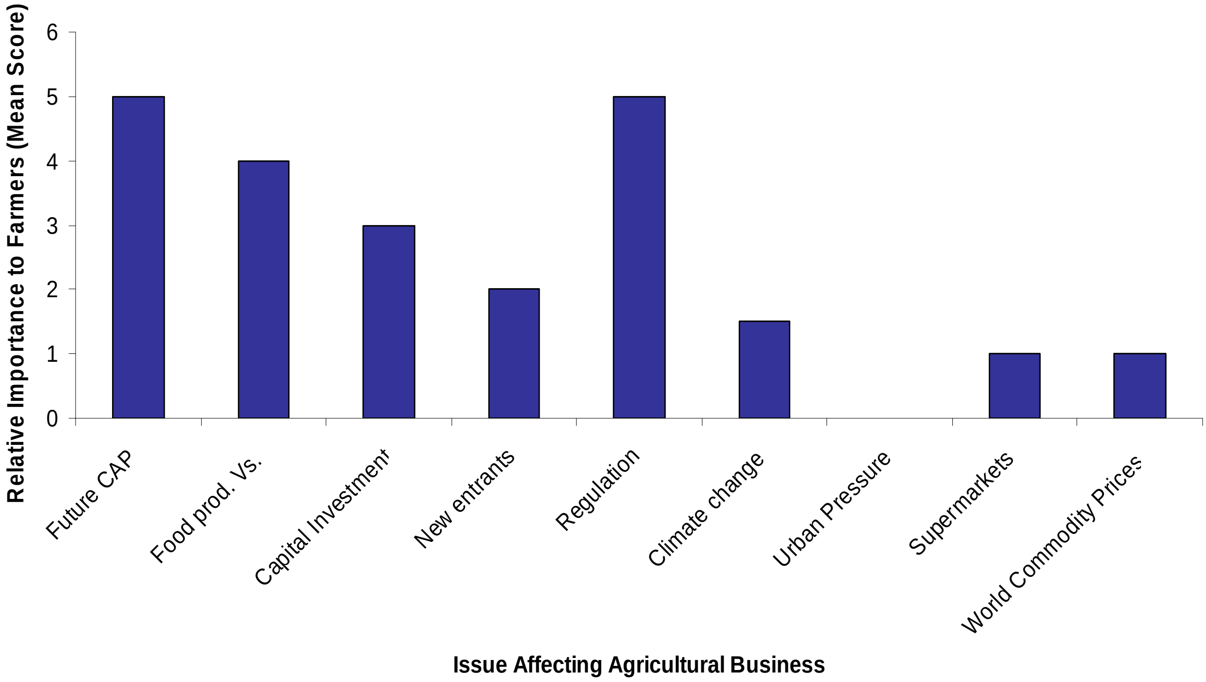
How would you rate your confidence in the future of farming?



Less than !0% of responders rate themselves as pessimistic, while 80% are quite or very confident in the future of farming.

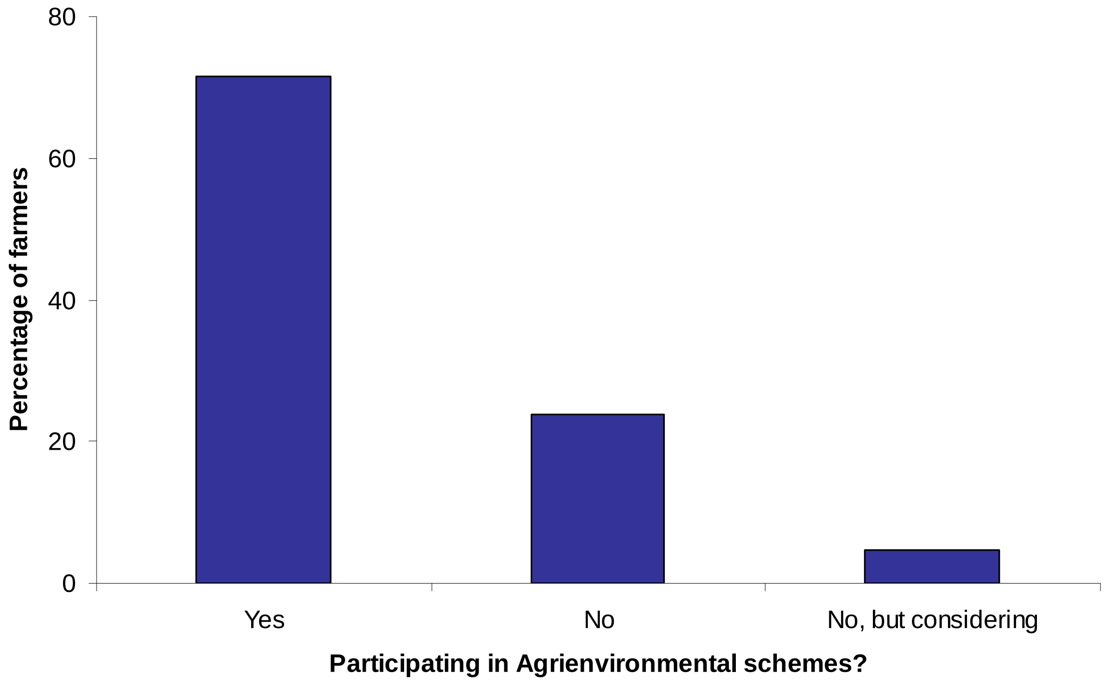
What would you say are the main issues affecting the future of agricultural businesses?

To answer this question, responders did not have to select all the options but if they did were asked to list in order where no. 1 = the most important. They could also put forward other options as issues. To analyse the results, a weighted score was given, depending on whether the option was selected and how highly its importance rated.



Of the 7 given options, regulation in the industry, food production vs. environment, and the future of the CAP were rated most important. Responders selected power of the supermarkets and world commodity prices as their own issues.

Have you taken up any of the agri-environment schemes?

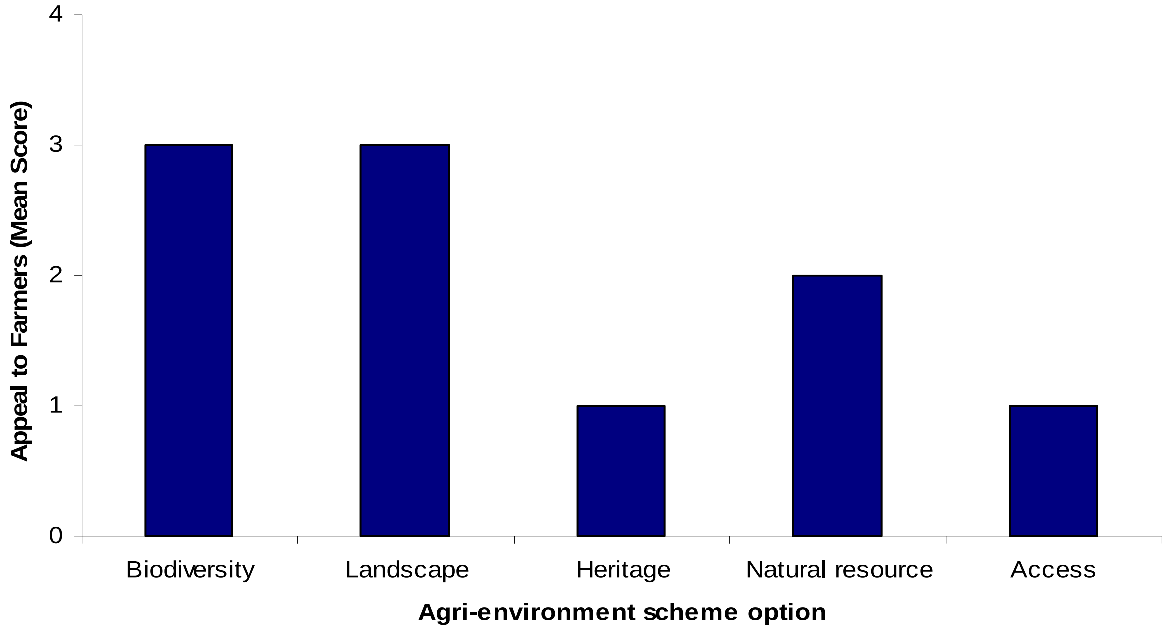


A clear majority (71%) participate in agri-environment schemes.
Reasons given for non participation were:

- Not applicable to farm type – suits arable not fruit
- Too restrictive / difficult to operate [as a tenant]
- Negative effect on profitability
- Small enterprise – near to retirement
- Small enterprise – happy to fund own conservation work
- Mistakes too heavily penalised – not worth the risk

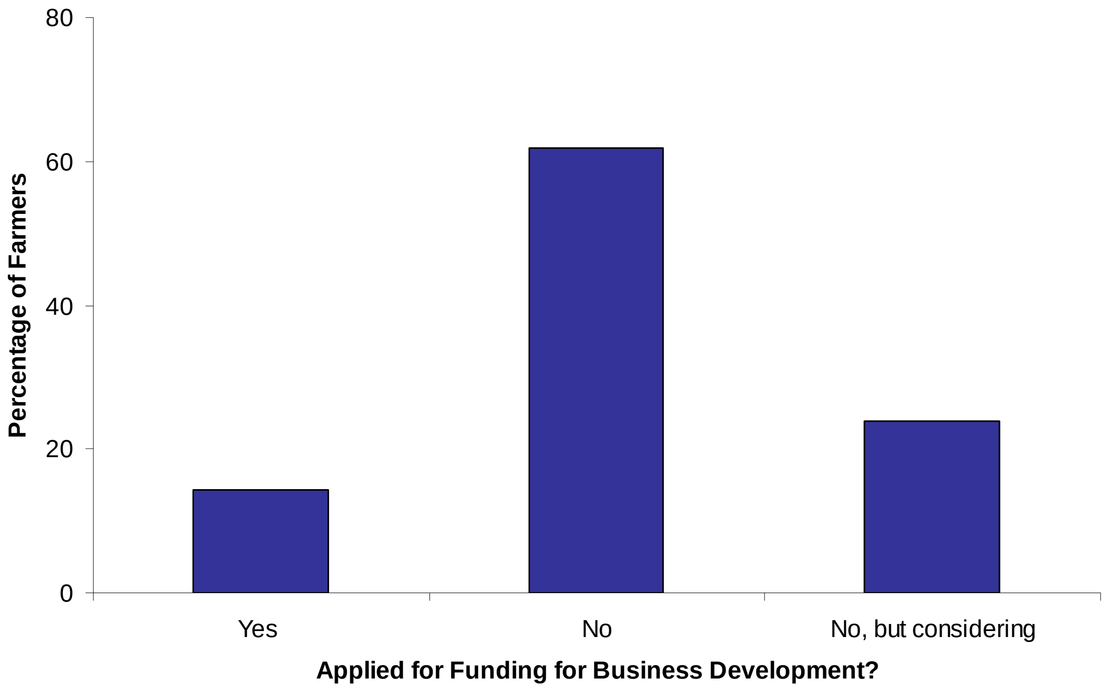
Agri-environment schemes pay for a wide range of options. What type of option are you likely to find most attractive?

To answer this question, responders did not have to select all the options but if they did were asked to list in order where no. 1 = the most important. To analyse the results, a weighted score was given, depending on whether the option was selected and how highly its importance rated.



Access and heritage were considered the least attractive, but all the options figured.

Have you applied for any funding for business development?

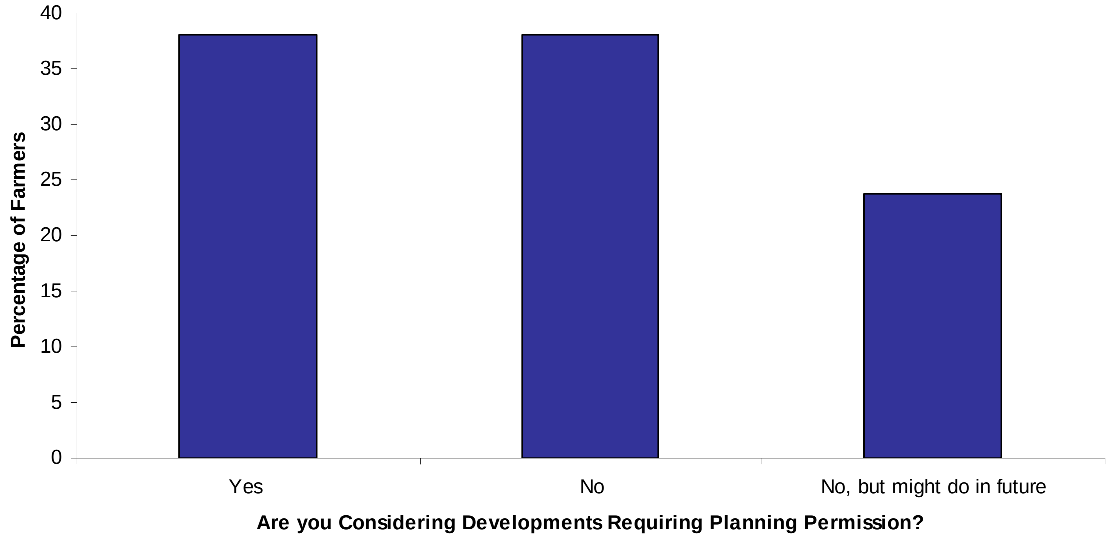


A clear majority (62%) have not applied for funding for business development.
Reasons for not applying given were:

- Business development not required
- Too many stipulations which cost more than the grant is worth
- Limited acreage
- Not sure what can be applied for

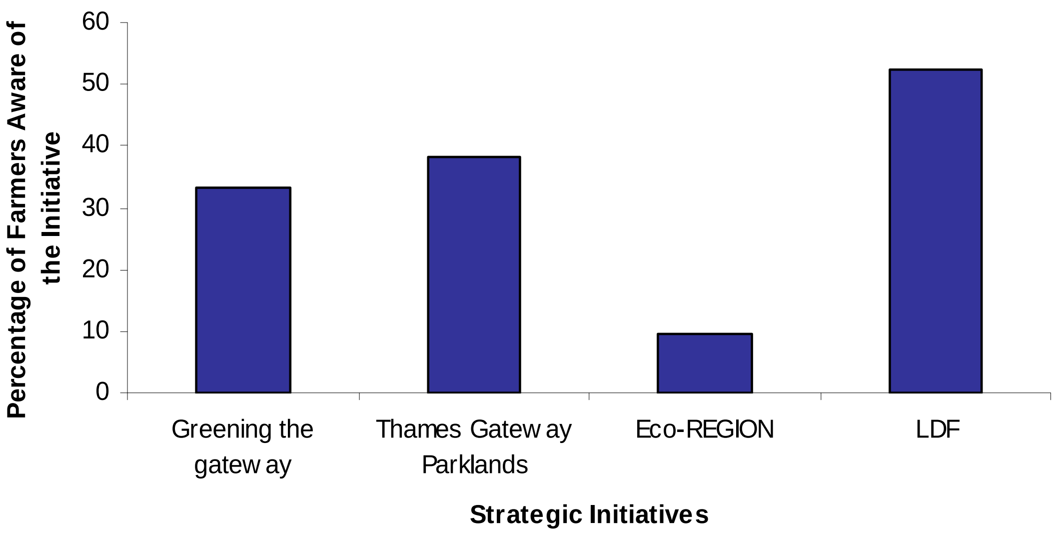
- Previous experience of complications e.g. surveying fees, planning
- Do not think [grants] apply to any development that might be undertaken

Are you considering any diversification/developments that could require planning permission?



Equal numbers of responders are considering developments that may need planning permission and are not. 24% may do in future .

Which of the following strategic initiatives in your area are you aware of?



The best known initiative (LDF) had been heard of by 52% of responders.

3.2.2 Analysis

Care needs to be exercised when extrapolating from the relatively small sample of questionnaires in this study. Nonetheless, the responses received fit the pattern of opinion expressed at the farmer meeting and were to be amplified in the follow up individual interviews. Key points emerging;

- The great majority are very or quite confident in future of farming.
- The majority are planning to increase enterprises.
- The main issues affecting future of farm businesses are the future of the CAP, food production vs. environment or non food crops, regulation and 'red tape'.
- The power of the supermarkets was independently identified as an issue.
- The majority are in agri-environment schemes, such as ESA or Environmental Stewardship.
- Biodiversity and landscape are the favoured options in schemes.
- Only a minority have applied for any funding for business development (e.g. SEEDA, LEADER).
- Roughly equal numbers are considering diversification/developments that could require planning permission, not considering, and might consider in future.
- Just over half the respondents have heard of the LDF, fewer than half have heard of the other mentioned initiatives in the area

3.2.3 Conclusions

The confidence levels are striking, and reflect the belief in a renewed need for food production echoed in recent government policy pronouncements. This confidence is in many ways in spite of a perceived lack of previous encouragement to farming, the relatively modest revival of farming income in recent years which higher input prices have all but negated, and the influence of the major retailers for which an 'ombudsman' is seen as an overdue and still to be realised proposal. It reflects a belief echoed in the individual interviews that the area has something special to offer, and that if many drop out of farming the fittest and best will survive and succeed.

The results demonstrate that farmers see the drivers in agriculture as national and supra national rather than local. Prominent in this is the future of the CAP after 2013, with farmers all too aware that SPS is a temporary input to farm incomes and the chances of an outright support cut are as likely as those of further redirection into 'green' schemes. As regards these schemes, farmers in the study area have lived with an (ESA) agri-environment scheme for some time and it has become familiar, most responders have taken some kind of scheme up. When not taken up schemes tended to be seen as restrictive or not applicable, which suggests at least the schemes are known about. Rural development funding is more recent, and few responders have taken them up. While difficulties within the schemes were cited, there was also a sense of uncertainty about their relevance to the farm business.

3.3 Individual interviews

3.3.1 Farmer Interviews

From the responders to the farmer questionnaire, four individuals were asked to take part in follow up interviews.

These were chosen to reflect farming types representative of the study area;

- 2 with field scale vegetables, arable and marshland permanent pasture in agri-environment schemes (1 of these with future diversification plans)
- 1 all grassland in agri-environment schemes plus equine and small scale diversification
- 1 all fruit with major diversified enterprises (fruit packing, garden centre/farm shop)

All farm both owned and tenanted land.

Interviewees were asked a standard set of questions going into the questionnaire in more detail and some additional questions. See Appendix [8] for questionnaire template, and full transcripts of the 4 interviews.

Summary:

- There is a strong perception of a special area for farming.
- Field scale vegetables is an elite, carrying risks but with rewards if done well.
- Arable is easier, if less potential profit; horses are a diversification option.
- Most have been in profit in the last 5 years but narrowly at times, diversification and agri-environment income can be a major support to some
- The pricing power of the supermarkets can dictate the difference between profit and loss.
- Labour needs are being met now but concern over potential future shortage, of skilled workers especially
- The problems of faming close to an urban area can be lived with.
- The ESA scheme is an accepted, familiar agri-environment scheme.
- Feeling that most planners lack an understanding of the agriculture industry.
- Engagement with local initiatives and policies is not always sought; where it is, email bulletins such as used by NFU might work.

3.3.2 Other interviews

NFU Rochester Branch Group Secretary Clive Wenham was interviewed. NFU Rochester Branch has its office at Meopham, and covers the whole study area. See Appendix [8] full transcript of the interview.

Summary:

- A fairly stable pattern of production, no 'minority' enterprises eg. dairy to drop out.
- Field scale vegetables still important and a large employer in the area, and significant employer of ethnic minorities.

- Supermarkets are the major market and have a powerful role.
- Number of farmers and growers has reduced - those left farm on a bigger scale and to a high standard.
- Rise of horse enterprises, with liveries and horse paddocks.
- Pride in conservation of the marshes; link between wildfowling and conservation
- Planning issues; change of use could be more applied to horse paddocks, polytunnels not a big issue in the area, but it could be.

3.3.3 Conclusions

The diversity of farm types in the area is exemplified by the contrast between the all grassland farm, with an important income from the ESA, and the all fruit farm, with major diversification enterprises but no engagement with agri-environment schemes. Yet these different farms have diversification in common; the other two farms, both producing field scale vegetables have no diversification, although one is moving towards opening a B&B enterprise.

The confidence levels in the future of farming are high, a shift back to food production is foreseen. Even the interviewee who expressed low confidence intends to carry on the business and sees opportunities in others leaving the industry. A refrain of the interviews is the power of the supermarkets over those who depend on them. Another is the planning system; a plea for more understanding of agriculture. Consultation by LAs and local initiatives is double edged; there are those who do not care whether their views are sought or not, and those who want to give their views but in a time and space convenient to them.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Key factors and issues

From the preceding sections, the matrix below brings together the issues for the study area that have emerged from the information and attitude studies.

1. Issues are grouped under various key factors; this does not imply any hierarchy but is merely a way of ordering the issues. The factors are;
   - Farming sectors to which issues relate e.g. arable or livestock
   - Factors which determine farm economics
   - Structural factors – the given features farming in the area has to work with
   - The role of regulation in farming
   - The role of incentives in farming
   - Attitudinal factors, coming from the farmer meeting, questionnaire and individual interviews
2. There are clearly links between many issues, for example between the grazing marshes landscape and local food production.
3. All the issues have a local dimension, however some come from purely local factors e.g. a high proportion of grades 1 & 2 land, while others have their origins at a national or even global level, e.g. input prices.

4.2 Studies and strategies in study area

The study was referred to the following local studies and strategy documents;

- Thames Gateway Parklands Vision (TGPV)
- Thames Gateway Eco-region prospectus (TGERP)
- Greening the Gateway Cluster Studies; Hoo (HCS) and Capstone (CCS)
- Medway Landscape Character Assessment study (MLCA)
- Gravesham Landscape Character Assessment study (GLCA)

As part of the analysis, these were studied for references to farmland and farming issues. It is stressed this was a rapid assessment and is not a critique, simply a way of seeing where farming in the area is positioned in the focus of the documents. Not surprisingly, as the studies are mainly landscape based, there is little reference to individual farming sectors or farm economics. There is one reference to local food sales. The studies and strategies are strong on structural factors; climate change features several times and landscape, biodiversity, trees / forestry and access frequently. In this view, farmland emerges as a valuable resource – a 'parkland' - in its own right, one that that in landscape terms sometimes needs repair but with much potential for forging rural : urban links.

4.3 Matrix - key factors and issues

Key factors	Issues for study area	Local study / strategy reference to farmland	Further information need
Sector factors:			
Horticulture sector	Characterises much of farmland landscape of area	TGPV	
	Near market sector but dependency on supply to supermarkets		
	High proportion of field scale vegetables – brings risks and rewards		
	Added value to output through food chain (e.g. packing)		Data specific to study area showing value of output, GVA
Arable sector	Low commodity vs. high input prices		
	Dependency on SPS in many enterprises		
	Best use of technology needed to maximise inputs – 'precision farming'		
	Pressure on arable land to contribute to farmland biodiversity		
Livestock sector	Maintains distinctive grazing marshes landscape		
	Opportunity for local branding / marketing of produce		
	Need for new entrants as old stockmen retire		
	Increased costs and regulation		
	Need for vigilance on disease close to mainland Europe		
Equine sector	Diversification opportunity for suitably placed farms		Data on enterprises
	Creates land management and planning concerns		Best practice guidelines
Economic factors:			
Output prices	Narrow margins often dependent on SPS for profitability		
Input prices	Price rises and future shortages threaten any marginal enterprise		
CAP reform	Future of SPS after 2013		
	'Pillar 2' outputs important especially Stewardship on marshes		
	Long term viability / decline in number of holdings		
Holding types	High proportion farms > 100ha (Medway)		
	Large tenanted area – opportunities to farmers to expand holdings		
	Institutional landowners – provide rented sector, group to influence?		More information and contacts
Land prices	+/- national average depending on productivity; arable prices highest		

	Non farming values influence price near towns		
Labour availability	Concerns over future skill shortage		Definition of agriculture and comparable data for Medway and Gravesham
	Important source of local employment in horticulture with social dimension		Study of labour and skills in area relevant to farming
Structural factors:			
Climate change	Restrictions on crops able to be grown from changed growing conditions		More detailed local modelling?
	Opportunities for new crops adapted to climate and needing less water	TGERP	
	Additional opportunities in energy production, carbon storage and reduced food miles	TGERP	
	Sea level rise may flood low lying farmland	GLCA	
Water resources	Restrictions on water use through abstraction and/or irrigation licensing		
	Emphasis on conserving water resources and winter storage		
Development and regional growth	Part of Thames Gateway		
Near urban farming	Access problems but can be lived with		
	Opportunities for farm : urban links to educate about countryside	TGPV, TGERP, HCS, CCS, MLCA, GLCA	
	Non farming landowners		
	Industrial landscape		
Soils and land classification	High proportion grades 1 & 2 land		Actual areas or % of study area
	Protection of resource in planning system		
Landscape	Characteristic landscapes with open skies, farmland with +ve and –ve aspects	TGERP, HCS, CCS, MLCA, GLCA	
Biodiversity	Nationally important habitat and species, managed by farming	TGERP, CCS	
Trees and forestry	Patchy but important woodland cover	TGPV, MLCA, GLCA	
Regulation:			
Waste regulations	Farm plastic recycling centres		
Cross-compliance	Ditch buffer strips main on ground issue but general awareness need		
NVZ	No dairy issues but no local CSF initiative to promote awareness		Actual areas or % of study area
Designations	Many protected areas – ESA is familiar to farmers through agri-environment		Actual areas or % of study area
Planning	Building conversion Polytunnels not an issue as yet	MLCA	

Incentive:			
Environmental Stewardship	ESA agreements expiring – need to transfer to Environmental Stewardship		Actual areas or % of study area
England Woodland Grant Scheme	Thames Gateway target area for new planting		Fit to local strategies
CFE	Opportunities in area for all 3 targets		
RDPE/Leader	Opportunity for both farming and community projects		
Market led initiatives	Horticultural sector adapted to retailer assurance schemes		
Local food/direct marketing	Local food sales opportunity but cuts across usual marketing strategy	TGPV	Survey work from farm shops and farmers markets
Attitudinal factors:			
Farming vs food production	A shift back to food production is foreseen by responders		
Confidence of farming industry	CAP reform important issue, but confidence levels high		
Changes in enterprises	Responders are mostly planning increases		
Regulation and red tape	Important issue for farmers – all sectors affected		
Supermarket power	Very significant to farmers – can determine profit or loss in an enterprise		
Uptake of agri-environment schemes	High uptake of ESA among responders - a familiar part of farming in the area		
Uptake of rural development schemes	Uncertainty about relevance of schemes, and planning permission needed in advance		
Planning in the countryside	Very significant to farmers – lack of understanding by planners of farming issues cited by several responders		
Visual benefits / special area	Reinforced by farmer interviews	TGPV	
Farmer consultation	Not always sought by farmers themselves, but needs to be simple		
Understanding of local policies	LDF only local initiative heard of by >50% of responders		

4.4 Information needs

At several points in the study a need for further information or follow up study has been found. These needs are appended in the matrix to the issues to which they refer.

5. PROPOSALS

5.1 Overview

The study area has a distinctive agricultural landscape and one to be highly valued. It is certainly more than just a 'rural fringe' to a largely urban core. Those who farm in it share in its sense of place and the uniqueness of the area. The challenge for those setting out plans and policies for the area and seeking more engagement with farmers in this, is to make farmers - and farming - stakeholders in their 'visions' and ideally part of shaping them.

The Local authorities who have resourced and commissioned this study are committed to engagement with farming the community, with the purpose of improving working practices and wanting to hear farmers' views. This recognizes the role of agriculture in the area, and provides a basis for further work with farmers and land managers in promoting funding, rural advice and other development opportunities, and in understanding the barriers land managers face in accessing funding and advice.

The studies and strategy documents referred to in the analysis section of this report are evidence that farming and the countryside it has created are valued. Together they can play a role in creating vibrant area with a well managed landscape, a strong sense of identity, and performing multiple functions.

At the same time, farmers see themselves as operating in a global market (albeit with some local opportunities) and the policies and incentives they respond to so as to meet their immediate business needs are set at a national and even international level. Local initiatives need to recognise and work with this.

The proposals put forward from this study are therefore a set of example practical actions likely to get farmer engagement, aimed at a wide range of local issues, and involving many other agencies.

5.2 Working with sectors

Task; take a multi stranded approach to working with the area's main agricultural sectors.

Aims:

- Horticulture – promote innovation competiveness and new markets
- Arable – promote alternative crops, precision farming to meet climate change
- Livestock – promote health and welfare and stock as a conservation tool
- Equine – promote landscape and grassland management best practice

This is an over-arching principle. It should be targeted by working with sector 'champions' and making good agricultural and environmental practice a cross-cutting theme.

5.3 Food production

Task; build on the 'brand' of the local horticultural and livestock sectors

Horticulture has kept abreast of changes in the industry by its ability to develop and innovate and compete, through new technology, better yields and cost reductions. Locally it has a distinct identity and is something of an elite sector, yet it is very tied to volume supply to the supermarkets. Livestock production is closely associated with the North Kent marshes which it is essential in maintaining, but has been very affected in the area by disease outbreaks and the restrictions and regulations in their wake. Agri-environment schemes have underpinned this sector.

Proposal	Target	Example action
FP1	Promote ways to increase local produce supply / adding value through processing and sales	LAs commission study of present food chain GVA
FP2	Support development of local outlets and 'food hubs' as alternative markets for fresh produce	PiNK and NFU farmer training
FP3	Examine food procurement opportunities in Medway and Gravesham	LAs review of public sector policies on food supply
FP4	Promote local supply and public procurement tendering to farmers	PiNK and NFU farmer training

5.4 Climate change

Task; assess local impact and the changes that will be required in farm businesses

Climate change will affect an already low rainfall area. Horticulture could be particularly affected with its reliance on adequate water, although all sectors will need to adapt through better soil management, and in related areas such as energy use.

Proposal	Target	Example action
CC1	Examine thoroughly the impacts of climate change on agriculture in the study area	LAs commission detailed local modelling of impact
CC2	Help farmers plan for opportunities such as new crops and constrains such as water supply	EA and Water Companies or NNFCC
CC3	Improved soil management in all crops and reduced emissions from livestock	Local LEAF audited farm with monitoring data
CC4	Promote winter storage reservoirs or water collection and recycling for horticulture	Demo farm using SEEDA water conservation grants
CC5	Analyse the added impact of fossil fuel depletion and potential for bioenergy / renewables	Fund energy audits and promote Farming Futures

5.5 Countryside and landscape

Task; tackle multiple issues, with some conflicts to reconcile

In a near urban area with multiple land uses and values there are inevitable pressures. Access is a sensitive issue with farmers, although the farmers interviewed felt it can be lived with, and it is an opportunity to educate about farming. Local studies and strategy documents place a high value on improved access and rural : urban links. Horse keeping has both countryside management and planning issues that span the farming and non farming sector.

Proposal	Target	Example action
CL1	Work with wildfowlers on study of well managed shooting with conservation and access	Farm walk on KWCA member farm
CL2	Identify where HLS targeting for access is compatible with species protection for birds	Farm walk with NE/FWAG on farm in HLS
CL3	Seek opportunities for positive access, especially educational, and tourism	HLS incentives linked to local strategy objectives
CL4	Ensure agencies tackling illegal access have a high profile and rural knowledge	NFU / police / LA training or workshop
CL5	Work with the equine sector on best practice in areas such as grass management, fencing	Workshop or farm walk using KDAONB guides

5.6 Agri-environment and compliance

Task; capitalise on the achievement of ESA and promote the 'whole farm' approach

The ESA has been a way of bedding in a high level of habitat designation and biodiversity action plan species targeting in the area, through a positive and well received agri-environment scheme. The task is to make sure this - and other schemes such as CSS and ELS – make the transition to the new and revised ELS / HLS schemes as well as meeting Kent ELS targets, and the target the industry has set itself in Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE). NVZ and cross-compliance regulation is not specific to the area but some sectors such as horticulture and equine may not be aware how these apply to them.

Proposal	Target	Example action
AE1	Promote agri-environment schemes and ensure they are flexible to individual farms	NE farm targeting for ELS/HLS via 'pipeline'
AE2	Support Campaign for the Farmed Environment in the area on delivery of local targets	Local 'beacon farm' with CFE/RSPB birds event
AE3	Help farmers and other landholders be compliant with regulation such as NVZ	EA compliance workshop in the area

5.7 Rural development, planning and local policies

Task; engage with farmers, protect the countryside and allow businesses to develop

Protection of best quality farmland (PPS7 - S.28) is the basis of local strategy documents' recognition of the role and importance of agriculture. Encouragement of farm development and diversification often comes down to a planning application, when understanding is needed on both sides. Both planning issues and paperwork are cited by farmers as obstacles to accessing rural development grants. With little time to spare, attending meetings and reading strategy documents is a low priority for famers and simple ways of consulting and informing are needed.

Proposal	Target	Example action
RD1	Promote RDPE schemes locally and help farmers meet the application requirements	Leader / SEEDA / NFU promotional event
RD2	Raise planners' level of knowledge of the needs of the modern agricultural business	KIRAS training for planners in both LAs
RD3	Raise farmers' awareness of the need to put a whole farm case for development proposals	KIRAS workshop for farmers covering both LAs
RD4	Ensure farmers get feedback on responses to consultation on local policies and initiatives	Consult / update by email using NFU as contact hub

Abbreviations:

CFE	Campaign for the Farmed Environment
EA	Environment Agency
FWAG	Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
KDAONB	Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
KIRAS	Kent Integrated Rural Advice Service
KWCA	Kent Wildfowling and Conservation Association
LAs	Local Authorities
NFU	National Farmers Union
NNFCC	National Non Food Crops Centre
PiNK	Produced in Kent
SEEDA	South East England Development Agency

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Plastic recycling

Kingsnorth Plastics

Address: Kingsnorth Waste Management, 17 Kingsnorth Industrial Estate, Hoo, Kent, ME3 9ND
Telephone: 01634 253557
Email: kingsnorthwaste@yahoo.co.uk

Plastic Items which CAN be recycled:

- Plastic Buckets
- Builders sacks – *please shake or turn inside out*
- Bulk Bags/Dumpy Bags – *shake out*
- Bumpers *no foam filled bumpers*
- Chemical containers - *must be triple rinsed & have foils removed & labels removed or defaced*
- Compost Bins – *shake or rinse if possible*
- Crates/Trays – all sources; bread, fruit, milk, soft drinks mushrooms, beer,
- Drums & Barrels - *must be thoroughly rinsed*
- Fertilizer Bags - *inner & outer must be separated and tags/ties removed*
- Plastic Pipes
- Plant pots & Seed trays - *bang out dirt*
- Plastic Trays
- Plastic/PVC Guttering & Pipes
- Polythene - *remove paper labels/sticky tape*
- PVC window frames
- Shrink-Wrap - *remove paper labels/ sticky tape*
- Stacking/Storage Boxes
- Traffic Cones – *rubber bases removed*
- Traffic Lights
- Wheelie Bins

Non Plastic Items which CAN be recycled:

- Cardboard – *must be flat Packed*
- Paper – *including magazines, newspapaers, brochures etc.*
- *polystyrene Blocks (artic loads only)*
- Aluminium & Steel cans – *must be rinsed & have any paper labels removed.*
- Wire
- CDs and DVDs - *please keep separate*
- Mobile Phones
- Printer Toner & Inkjet Cartridges

Items NOT recycled:

- cellophane wrap
- polystyrene
- brown bottles/chemical containers
- Plastic Bottles or light plastic
- acrylics
- nylon or plastic string or strapping

- plastic with a ‘7’ recycling code
- poly tunnel or silage

Services:

- Collection and delivery services.
- Contract terms for Bulk and ongoing deliveries
- No minimum quantity limit

Fees are individually based. High bulk customer can sometimes receive services free of charge or payment for their materials.

Born Again Plastics

Address: Mid-Sussex
Telephone: 01622 814236
Email:

Items which CAN be recycled:

- Silage Sheet; Silage Wrap
- Plastic Feed & Bedding Bags
- HDPE Containers; Plastic Mineral Buckets
- Fertilizer and Seed Bags
- Net Wrap
- String; Poly Tunnel
- Plastic Water Buckets
- Cardboard, Paper Feed Bags
- Tractor/ Lorry/ Car Batteries
- Waste Oil & Filters.

Items NOT recycled:

- Tyres
- Concrete
- Timber

(If these items are mixed with the recyclable waste there will be a charge for their disposal)
ALL recyclable waste should be clean and dry before deliver/collection (otherwise additional charge will be incurred for this).
Materials must be separated

Services:

- Collection Services
- Duty of Care receipt and annual certificate

Clients must pay a registration fee and an annual membership fee
Collection charges are based on current waste charges

Appendix 2 Farmers Markets and Farm Shops in and around Medway

Farmers Markets:

Gravesend Farmers Market
Old Town Hall, High Street, Gravesend, Kent
2nd Friday every month, 10am – 2pm

Established: October 2007 (on a trial basis)

Hemstead Valley Farmers Market
Hemstead Valley Shopping Centre, Green Car Park, Gillingham, Kent
2nd Sunday every month, 10am -2pm

Established: September 2006

Meopham Farmers Market
Meopham Fitness and Tennis Centre, Wrotham Rd, Meopham, Kent
1st Sunday every month, 9am – 12:30pm

Established: July 2004

Rochester Farmers Market
Corporation Street Car Park, 95 High Street, Rochester, Kent
3rd Sunday every month 9am – 1pm

Established: June 2000

Vigo Farmers Market
Market Square, Vigo, Nr Meopham, Kent
3rd Saturday every month 10am – 1pm

Established: August 2009

Source: Kent Farmers Markets Association
http://www.kentfarmersmarkets.org.uk/

Farm Shops:

AC Goatham and son
Street Farm, 103 Stoke Road, Rochester, Sittingbourne, ME3 9BH

Established:

A Harrison & Son
Manor Farm, Lower Rainham Road, Gillingham,Kent

Established:

Broadditch Farm Shop
Manor Farm, New Barn Road, Southfleet Gravesend, Kent DA13 9PU

Established: Since 1848

Court Farm Country Larder and Invicta Natural Meats
Court Farm Quality Butchers, Upper Halling, Rochester, Kent ME2 1HR

Established:

DL MacLean
Hever Court Farm, Church Road Cobham, Gravesend, Kent, DA13

Established:

Farm View
94 Delce Road, Rochester, ME1 2DH

Established:

Fruberry Foods
14, Manor Rd, Chatham, Kent ME4 6AG

Established:

Grange Road Farm Shop
Grange Farm, Grange Road, Gillingham, Kent ME7 2UD

Established:

Lean Meats Butchers
140 Pelham Rd, Gravesend, Kent DA11 0JH

Established:

Luddesdown Organic Farms Ltd
Court Lodge, Luddesdown, Cobham, Kent DA13 0XE

Established: fully organic to Soil Association standards since 1988

Mierscourt Farm Shop
Mierscourt Road, Rainham, Gillingham, Kent

Established:

Mockbeggar Farm Shop
Town Road, Cliffe Woods, Rochester, Kent, ME3 8EU

Established:

Street Farm Shop
Street Farm, Stoke Road, Hoo, Rochester, Kent

Established:

Temple Farm
Cuxton Road, Rochester, ME2

Established: Farm shop newly established 2008

Westmoor Farm Shop
Westmoor Farm, Moor Street, Rainham, Gillingham, Kent

Established:

The Valley Farm shop
7 The Parade, Valley Dr, Gravesend, Kent, DA12

Established:

Source:

Search: Farm shops in Medway @ Farmshop.uk.com
http://www.farmshop.uk.com/local-area/south-east/medway/

Search: Farm Shop @ Kentfind.co.uk
http://www.kentfind.co.uk/directory/view_category.php?category=766

Appendix 3 Farmer meeting invitation letter

Kent & Sussex FWAG

Kent Office: Coldharbour Farm, Wye, Ashford, Kent TN25 5DB
Telephone (01233) 813186
E-mail paul.cobb@fwag.org.uk
www.fwag.org.uk

13 February 2010

Dear

FWAG in Kent, together with the Councils of Medway and Gravesham Borough, are pleased to invite you to a free morning meeting on the theme of '**Profit from your Environment**' on Wednesday 9th December at Cobham Hall, near Cobham.

We have a very good line up of speakers to tell you about the opportunities in your area;

- Speakers from LEADER and Natural England will explain the Rural Development and Environmental Stewardship funding on offer at the moment.
- Jenny Bate from Kent Downs AONB will present the farmers Diversification Toolkit, a vital DIY tool if you are thinking about a project with planning implications.
- William Alexander, the Farmers Weekly Diversification Farmer of the Year, will tell us how his farm successfully branched out into non-food crops.
- Kent NFU Chairman Kevin Attwood, and Martin Hall from Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway, will talk about getting involved in local strategies.

As well as this, Medway and Gravesham want to know what farmers in their areas think, so there will be a chance to have your say on farming and local issues.

We are in the attractive surroundings of Cobham Hall, and the meeting will conclude with a hot lunch. **Please return the reply slip on the enclosed flyer if you can come.** *We would be very grateful if you can take a few moments to fill in the questionnaire, and post it back with the reply slip in the envelope provided, or on its own if you cannot come on the 9th December.* Your views matter. **All returned entries will go into our prize draw!**

Kind Regards,

Paul Cobb

Paul Cobb,. Farm Conservation Adviser, Kent & Sussex FWAG

Greening the Gateway
KENT AND MEDWAY

Appendix 4a Medway Flyer side1

ATTACHED AS PDF

Appendix 4b Medway Flyer side2

ATTACHED AS PDF

Appendix 5 Profit From Your Environment

ATTACHED AS PDF

Appendix 6 Notes from Medway Farmer Meeting

‘Profit from your Environment’

Wednesday 9th December 2009 at Cobham Hall

Notes from Medway & Gravesham Farmers Discussion session

Farmers’ interaction with policy making

Farmer (KA) – Sometimes it seems that government has too higher ambitions that don’t actually involve farmers, but through some key representatives there are ways of getting the industry’s points of view across.

Council (MDWY) – As a council we have acknowledged farmers poorly in the past, but there is now willing to open dialogue with those in the farming industry and find out where farming is going in the district.

Farmer (KA) – There has been an abuse of the acknowledgement of farmer’s inputs into the core strategies in the past, probably because of the current government’s reluctance to admit there is an actual agricultural industry in the country. The situation has changed over the past five years for the better.

Council (GRVSHM) – Gravesham Council have also found it difficult to get a link into the farming industry, but have attempted it. We held a joint event with representatives from the Leader programme and set up a breakfast networking meeting. However out of those that attended there were only two actual farmers.

Gravesham are really keen to support diversification and have very useful links and information on the council’s website.

Other (JB) – Are farmers aware of how and when they can engage with their local authority and make comments on their policies, for example their core strategy?

Farmer – There are always going to be some farmers who don’t want to get involved anyway.

Farmer – If one has the internet it is much easier to view and keep involved with these documents, but the majority of famers that would get involved are probably just those on the urban fringes who have particular pressing issues.

Council – The Core Strategy document in due out for consultation Feb/Mar 2010 and all input would be appreciated. Those of you who are interested in this could also be included on the Gravesham planning database of contacts and kept in the loop.

The consultation period on strategic documents is normally published in the local press, and some farmers may get individual letters.

Farmer (KA) - Often it is left to representative bodies for the industry like the NFU to comment on policy, but this can result in a generic response from the whole industry as there is a limit to how many issues local agents would be aware of. It is however an efficient way of tackling problems for those in the industry and examples of where policy has been amended can be seen in the case of the Tunbridge Wells borough council's policies. Ultimately it would be better if farmers across the region had their own input.

Farmer – I responded to a document called the Medway Wildlife and Countryside Strategy, but nothing came of it, I heard nothing back regarding my comments. I also attended a Wildlife and Countryside forum, but various other pressure groups also attended and I often didn't get a chance to share my thoughts on matters. These forums are meant to allow the council better understanding of rural issues, but this was not achieved.

Medway Council do not have such a forum because they have a much greater urban than rural area within the district.

GTG – Apologies for the lack of response to your comments made on the Wildlife and Countryside Strategy; this shouldn't have happened. Normally when a comment is made it is logged and given a number, it can then be tracked. If a comment is made, but it is not taken into account for the revision of the document it could potentially make the whole policy unsound.

Farm Business Plans

GTG – Do farmers in the area already have for example ten year development or business plans established?

Farmer (WA) – Most of the time farmers will have a plan, it may be in his head, but he will know what he is aiming for in the near future where both his farming and diversification is concerned. If you are supplying supermarkets or you belong to assurance schemes you are often required to have a business plan.

Business plans may not always be formal, the aims and objectives may be set out, but more often than not funding for some of the ideas has not been thought about.

The Future of Farming

FWAG - Do Farmers have confidence in farming and are they influenced more by local issues or national issues?

Farmer – We are governed by Supply and Demand, which is on a national or even international scale, we look at the bigger picture.

Farmer – We are mostly governed by what is happening on a national level rather than a local level as the major factors influencing the industry tend to come from the EU and then our national government.

Farmer - If farmers weren't confident in the industry it would collapse anyway. With world population on the increase there is a confidence among farmers in food production especially.

Farmer – It is important that the farming industry is no longer seen as backwards and that we promote the new type of efficient and business minded farming that can hold its own.

Urban Fringe Issues

Farmer (WA) – Many farmers don't mind controlled access on their farms and are keen to help educate people who have little understanding of farming. However by providing access ways and paths problems like fly tipping and off-road joy riding is encouraged. This results in damage to crops, land, hedges and gates and means new fencing and locked gates are often required. In the local authorities policies access is supported, but education and understanding of farming, needs to also be incorporated alongside this.

Farmer – Some land that's put forward as being important for conservation is taken advantage of by people that think they have a right to then access it.

Council – In recent surveys it was found most urban dwelling people visited country parks for an experience of rural life, rather than "real countryside". Should there be more "honey pot" sights like this to prevent misuse of farmland?

Farmer – This would reduce some of the pressure on rural problem areas, but you will always get some people that go outside of these sites. It would also fail to help educate people about "real farming".

KA = Kevin Attwood

JB = Jenny Bate

WA = William Alexander

MDWY = Medway

GRVSHM = Gravesham

GTG = Greening the Gateway Kent and Medway

Appendix 7 Questionnaire

Please take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire, and return it in the stamped addressed envelope provided. Your farm will not be identified in the findings, but the results will help us improve our awareness of agriculture in your area and how you see the future.

All returned entries will go into our prize draw!

WHAT ARE YOUR CURRENT ENTERPRISES AND ARE THEY LIKELY TO INCREASE IN FUTURE, DECREASE OR STAY THE SAME IN THE NEXT 3-5 YEARS? WHAT BRIEFLY IS THE REASON FOR ANY CHANGE?

Put a ☑:	Enterprise:	Increase	Decrease	Same	Reason for change
	Arable				
	Field scale vegetables				
	Top Fruit				
	Soft Fruit				
	Beef				
	Sheep				
	Dairy				
	Pigs				
	Poultry				
	Equine				
	Environmental Schemes				
	Diversification eg. tourism				
Other (please specify)					

Farm area (ac or ha) : Owned [ ] Tenanted [ ] Other eg contract [ ]

Numbers employed (incl. family) Full time [ ] Part time [ ] Seasonal [ ]

How would you rate your confidence in the future of farming?

	Very confident	Quite confident	Not confident	Not sure/ don't know
Put a ☑:				

What would you say are the main issues affecting the future of agricultural businesses? (you do not have to select all the options but if you do please list in order where 1 = the most important)

Future of CAP	
Food production vs. environment or non food crops eg. energy	
Capital investment	
New entrants into the industry	
Regulation and 'red tape'	
Climate change	
Other (please specify)	

Have you taken up any of the agri-environment schemes (e.g. CSS, ESA, Environmental Stewardship)?

Yes [ ] No [ ] No, but considering joining a scheme in future [ ]

If you have not taken up any agri-environment schemes, why not?

Agri-environment schemes pay for a wide range of options. What type of option are you likely to find most attractive? (you do not have to select all the options but if you do please list in order where 1 = the most important)

Biodiversity options such as grassland management
Landscape options e.g. restoring hedges and tree features
Heritage options such as buildings and archaeology
Natural resource management options (soil, water)
Access options i.e. providing permissive routes

Have you applied for any funding for business development (e.g. SEEDA, LEADER/RDPE)?
Yes No No, but considering applying for funding in future

If you have not applied for funding for business development, why not?

Are you considering any diversification/developments that could require planning permission?

Yes No No, but might do in future

Which of the following strategic initiatives in your area are you aware of? (please tick)

Greening the Gateway
Thames Gateway Parklands
Eco-region
Local Development Framework (LDF)

Our reporting will include only anonymous general summaries. However a follow up short individual interview will help us strengthen our findings.

Please tick this box if you do not wish to be contacted about this

Name: ....

Address:

Postcode

Tel. No: .... Mobile ....

Many thanks! *Kent & Sussex FWAG, Coldharbour Farm, Wye Kent TN25 5BU*

Appendix 8 Interview template, Farms A, B, C, D interviews and NFU interview

Farmer individual interview template

Area owned tenanted other

Enterprises Marketing

Changes to enterprises / reason for changes

Planned future changes / drivers for any future changes

Numbers employed full time part time seasonal

Types of work done by employees

How employees are recruited

Business turnover this year

Number of years business in profit in the last 5 years

Business confidence level / reason for confidence level

Constraints on the farm business

Opportunities for the farm business

Perception of production taking precedence over environment in future

Engagement in agri-environment schemes

Attitude to agri-environment schemes / perceived barriers to accessing

Engagement in other RDPE schemes

Attitude to other RDPE schemes / perceived barriers to accessing

Issues with planning permission / perception of issues locally

Perception of LA engagement / consultation with farmers

Perception of agriculture in the area / trends towards or away from types of production

Perception of uniqueness of farming in the area (+ve or –ve)

Any comments

Farmer individual interview - Farm A

Area 526 ha owned 243 ha tenanted 283 ha

Enterprises
Field scale vegetables average 140 ha
Arable average 300 ha
Marshland permanent pasture c. 86 ha
Beef 150 fattening cattle, sheep 400 fattening plus winter keep sheep
Agri-environment schemes

Marketing
All field scale vegetables sold through supermarkets; pack as much as possible of their own
Follows markets for arable crops, sold forward to grain traders.
Beef and sheep sold live at Ashford market

Changes to enterprises / reason for changes
Arable area has increased, field scale vegetables reduced
Reason; field scale vegetables is a high risk crop with too high production cost for the current return, whereas arable will at least break even or only lose a little. Feels that FSV will come right, so is being retained in the business.

Planned future changes / drivers for any future changes
None planned. Cannot see any alternatives, would take them up if they did.

Numbers employed; full time 6 part time 15

Types of work done by employees
Part time do vegetable harvest. Others do vegetable harvest, livestock, spraying, general farm work, minibus and lorry driving

How employees are recruited
Some part time are recruited from ethnic community in Medway towns. Others are E European students; 2 of these likely to come back. Of full timers, 3 are local 1 from out of area. Does not have a problem getting workers (collects and returns the staff from Medway, this is a long standing system that works well). Might be hard to get more skilled workers in future e.g. tractor drivers.

Business turnover this year
£800,000 - £900,000

Number of years business in profit in the last 5 years
4/5
Remarks; years in profit were by a very narrow margin.

Business confidence level / reason for confidence level
Quite confident. Reasons; short term there are difficulties, a lack of money in the industry and new entrants. Farm business tenancies were meant to provide opportunities but have

led to short term lets to existing farmers. The longer term looks better, with more money in the industry.

Constraints on the farm business
Does not believe UK farmers should be subsidised, but other governments support their countries farmers better.

Opportunities for the farm business
Future demand for food, but if other world producers e.g. Ukraine reached their full potential as a UK producer they would struggle to compete.

Perception of production taking precedence over environment in future
There will always be land that cannot be farmed intensively – this should be used for the environment, while the other land should be pushed harder. The public will not want to see all the environmental benefits [farmers have provided through schemes] lost.

Engagement in agri-environment schemes
Has been in the ESA scheme for15 years. Keen to go forward into Environmental Stewardship.

Attitude to agri-environment schemes / perceived barriers to accessing
ESA worked well in early years, with a dedicated project officer. Then became harder to work with [more distant] scheme managers. Latterly has improved, with realisation that all the marshes are different, and need on the spot solutions, not blanket prescriptions. Has no experience of Environmental Stewardship.

Engagement in other RDPE schemes
None – has not done any development they would apply to

Attitude to other RDPE schemes / perceived barriers to accessing
n/a

Issues with planning permission / perception of issues locally
None personally. Not aware of local issues on getting housing for farm workers. Plenty of housing available in the area.

Perception of LA engagement / consultation with farmers
As chair of PC is kept well informed. If not it would be difficult to be aware – local initiatives are not as well publicised as their promoters think. Farmers do not want more meetings or paper, but a system of email bulletins such used by NFU might work.

Perception of agriculture in the area / trends towards or away from types of production
More strawberry production. Potato production declined considerably.

Perception of uniqueness of farming in the area (+ve or –ve)
Always a farming area known for its early production which gave it a market advantage. Less important now that supermarkets can get produce from anywhere. Problems of

faming close to an urban area are the same as anywhere; they are a pain rather than a major problem.

Any comments
None

Farmer individual interview - Farm B

Area 162 ha   tenanted 162 ha

Enterprises
Field scale vegetables c. 66 ha
Arable c. 45 ha
Marshland permanent pasture c. 40 ha (let to a grazier)
Agri-environment schemes

Marketing
Most field scale vegetables goes to supermarkets; some through London wholesale markets, but this is not a dependable market.
Arable crops (wheat) marketed through grain traders

Changes to enterprises / reason for changes
Looking to start a bed and breakfast enterprise to diversify and make use of redundant farm building.

Planned future changes / drivers for any future changes
Will keep the business as it is, as long as it makes a profit. A driver for change to this policy would be low prices for produce.

Numbers employed   full time 2   part time 1   seasonal 60

Types of work done by employees
Part time worker (student from E Europe) does tractor and fork lift work. Seasonal workers do vegetable picking, 2 local workers do setting up and weighing.

How employees are recruited
Some part time recruited by a gangmaster from ethnic community in Medway towns. Others are E European students who come through the Concordia employment arrangement. Has not had problems to date getting enough workers, although has a large area of beans this year which might stretch labour needs.

Business turnover this year
About £700,000

Number of years business in profit in the last 5 years
3/5
Remarks; profit in the last 3 years.

Business confidence level / reason for confidence level
Quite confident. Reasons; rising world population and therefore demand for food. Many farmers in agri-environment schemes takes land out of production = chance for others.

Constraints on the farm business
Assurance schemes (required protocols to supply to supermarkets) each with their own paperwork and compliance inspections.

Opportunities for the farm business
Carbon footprint issue increases premium on local production and will benefit those close to Medway urban area. Field scale vegetables is hard work and stressful, but if you are prepared to work you will succeed.

Perception of production taking precedence over environment in future
Personally food production takes precedence. Others will take money from agri-environment schemes.

Engagement in agri-environment schemes
In ESA scheme till 2012. Will join Entry Level Stewardship after this as a commitment to Producer group requirement for Assurance Schemes

Attitude to agri-environment schemes / perceived barriers to accessing
Would not joint unless they had to. A waste of taxpayers money. Farmers provide environmental benefit without schemes. Personally has done a lot of conservation work, and run a shoot that attracts lots of birds.

Engagement in other RDPE schemes
Might apply for grant for B&B enterprise (waiting on planning permission)

Attitude to other RDPE schemes / perceived barriers to accessing
Feels getting grant will itself be a costly process, but it is for quite a large amount of funding. Has an 'old fashioned' view to getting taxpayer money, thinks farmers should stand on their own feet.

Issues with planning permission / perception of issues locally
Planning process is very slow – the B&B project has been ongoing for 10 years, so many obstacles put in the way of the scheme. Gets the feeling planners hate farmers, he and his neighbours both refused conversion to residential. Not aware of local issues on getting housing for farm workers.

Perception of LA engagement / consultation with farmers
Not really aware of initiatives and issues (gets a newsletter). Would not like to be more consulted. Thinks LA do too much that impinges on peoples lives.

Perception of agriculture in the area / trends towards or away from types of production
Has neighbours who have moved out of traditional agriculture - gone into ventures such as a boatyard, horse paddocks, log cutting. Farmers cannot be set in their ways, need to be on top of every aspect of the job to keep costs down.

Perception of uniqueness of farming in the area (+ve or –ve)

Area has good quality land, good location by the river, frost free, produces early crops to get the market earlier. Farms have good supply of water. Problems of faming close to an urban area have not been too bad in the last couple of years – they can be lived with.

Any comments
None

Farmer individual interview - Farm C

Area 296 ha owned 93 ha tenanted 203 ha

Enterprises
All grassland
Beef 50 cows and followers, sheep 750 ewes
Equine DIY livery with 12 horses
Diversification 2 barns let for storage 2 cottages let to tenants
Agri-environment schemes

Marketing
Beef and sheep mainly through Ashford market. Some store lambs sold privately. The marshes do not produce very high quality stock, most need to be sold on to be finished.

Changes to enterprises / reason for changes
Sheep numbers going up to 900-1000, beef numbers also increasing. Took on more land, some bought and some rented.

Planned future changes / drivers for any future changes
Took on more land when opportunity arose which also meant business had to expand or face contraction. Unlikely to significantly change the business otherwise, unless more land becomes available. The next review of the Common Agriculture Policy could be a driver to future change however.

Numbers employed full time 1 part time 2

Types of work done by employees
Full time = self, part time are also family. Contractors do shearing and hay making, otherwise all farm work is shared by family members.

How employees are recruited
n/a

Business turnover this year
£100,000

Number of years business in profit in the last 5 years
5/5
Remarks; profit when all non farm income and SPS taken into account. Environmental Stewardship an important part of this.

Business confidence level / reason for confidence level
Quite confident. Reasons; the farm business can carry on through most changes. A significant threat to the business would be not maintain the sea defences, leading to flooding of the marshland.

Constraints on the farm business
The profitability of the core livestock farming enterprises

Opportunities for the farm business
Food shortages may make these core enterprises more profitable.

Perception of production taking precedence over environment in future
Believes there will be a shift back to food production from the recent emphasis on the environment.

Engagement in agri-environment schemes
In the EAS since it started (15 years), now in Higher Level Stewardship.

Attitude to agri-environment schemes / perceived barriers to accessing
Found ESA very inflexible - stocking rate led to undergrazing. This seems to have been recognised in the HLS, it is more flexible. Used an adviser to help get into the scheme; finds NE staff good to deal with.

Engagement in other RDPE schemes
None – has not done any development they would apply to

Attitude to other RDPE schemes / perceived barriers to accessing
n/a

Issues with planning permission / perception of issues locally
None personally; put up a barn under agriculture permitted development. Not aware of local issues on getting housing for farm workers.

Perception of LA engagement / consultation with farmers
Not conscious of consultations or advertising of policies. Feels Medway sees itself as an urban authority with a rural fringe. Aware NFU responds a lot on farmers behalf, but would like to be consulted on significant plans. Contact by email would be acceptable.

Perception of agriculture in the area / trends towards or away from types of production
There is less arable land on the marshes, with reversion to grass in agri-environment schemes, and livestock farming will be a constant on this land. Otherwise not a lot of change likely; while orchards may come and go, both fruit and vegetable growing will still be important on the 'upland'.

Perception of uniqueness of farming in the area (+ve or –ve)
The marshes is an unusual landscape although not unique. There are pressures - public access, urban expansion in Medway and Gravesend. Nuisances such as sheep worrying are increasing, but have to be put up with. A police farm crime specialist at Meopham is a help.

Any comments
None

Farmer individual interview - Farm D

Area 372 ha owned 198 ha tenanted 174 ha

Enterprises
Top fruit 364 ha
Strawberries 4 ha
Cherries 2 ha
3 full time packhouses, taking own fruit and from 20 other growers
Farm shop/café/garden centre/pet shop (established 25 years)
[A second site at Sittingbourne has a farm shop and wedding venue]

Marketing
To supermarkets, and through own retail outlets

Changes to enterprises / reason for changes
Has recently increased top fruit area by taking on more land and doing new planting.

Planned future changes / drivers for any future changes
Will carry on the business, hopes a next generation will be coming in. No radical changes planned, now has 80 ha planted to modern orchard systems, will keep replanting orchards with new varieties. A driver for change to this policy would be supermarkets consistently paying prices for produce below production cost; could be borne for 1-2 years but long term stops reinvestment in the farm business.

Numbers employed full time 154 part time 10 seasonal 200

Types of work done by employees
90 of full time workers in packhouses. 10 full time farm workers. 8 lorry drivers. Remainder work in retail business (shops etc.). Seasonal workers do fruit picking.

How employees are recruited
30-40 per year through Concordia overseas [mainly E European] worker recruitment programme. Rest are long term local employees, often extended family and through several generations. Has not had a problem finding labour, gives overseas workers good conditions, but they do not stay.

Business turnover this year
£14 million (of which fruit = 90%)

Number of years business in profit in the last 5 years
2/5 (1 year break even)
Remarks; the farm's retail businesses struggle against competition from supermarkets. A trend towards paying a premium for local and seasonal produce was hit by the recession, price is now the only driver.

Business confidence level / reason for confidence level
Not confident. Reasons; the methods of the supermarkets. Agriculture cannot set its own price for its products, which have consistently drifted downwards since the late 70ies. Fruit prices average now 75-80 p/kilo. If a supermarket ombudsman could intervene, a break even price = 80-85 p/kilo, 90 p/kilo would allow a profit for reinvestment.

Constraints on the farm business
In a family fruit business like this, a lack of trained competent personnel; foresees a skill shortage in 10-15 years. Overseas workers are short term, local young people do not see farming as a good enough job prospect. To keep up intake, [land based] colleges have broadened their courses, this does not produce people with the required skills.

Opportunities for the farm business
If new fruit varieties get public acceptance, these could get a premium, if supermarkets pay a fair price. A lot of growers are not producing to high enough quality, they will go out of the industry, leaving those with better methods to take over.

Perception of production taking precedence over environment in future
Does not think production will overtake the environment, but feels 'global' standards for production are more rigorously enforced in the UK than elsewhere. Population increase will demand more food, but there is enough land if it is better managed.

Engagement in agri-environment schemes
Looked at Environmental Stewardship when it came out and one of the supermarkets was pushing suppliers to join as part of its assurance scheme. Feels that engagement in these schemes already requires a lot of commitment from the business, through e.g. environmental policies, reduced inputs.

Attitude to agri-environment schemes / perceived barriers to accessing
Feels agri-environment schemes are more geared to arable, cannot justify giving up e.g. field margins round fruit orchards.

Engagement in other RDPE schemes
Had a SEEDA grant for new coldstore at Sittingbourne.

Attitude to other RDPE schemes / perceived barriers to accessing
Used a consultant for grant application; he does a lot of this work and knows how to go through the system for the best result.

Issues with planning permission / perception of issues locally
Planning permission for coldstore took 4 years and had 2 refusals. Feels most planners lack an understanding of the agriculture industry. For example amalgamation of farms needs bigger more industrial scale buildings but it is not practical or economic to relocate these to an industrial estate. Difficult to get planning permission for caravans for overseas workers, due to local prejudices about 'foreign workers taking British jobs'. Not aware of local issues on getting housing for farm workers. Plenty of new build available in the area.

Perception of LA engagement / consultation with farmers
No strong views, not worried about being more consulted, but a system of email bulletins such used by NFU might work. Feels LA will do what they want. Aware the NFU meets with LA but sceptical about the outcome.

Perception of agriculture in the area / trends towards or away from types of production
A lot of farms have become horse paddocks. Orchards are declining; some varieties such as Cox and Bramley falling out of favour. Farm buildings converted. Farmers will go, leaving opportunities for those that remain.

Perception of uniqueness of farming in the area (+ve or –ve)
Farmers keep the countryside such as its orchards looking nice. Without the work farmers, it would be 'an overgrown mess'. Medway is becoming more of a city, it is nice to have rural areas where people can enjoy the countryside.

Any comments
None

NFU individual interview

NFU Rochester Branch Group Secretary - Clive Wenham
NFU Rochester Branch has its office at Meopham, and covers the whole study area
Currently it has 50-160 Branch members representing 63 farming businesses in the area.

Agricultural production, lifestyles and markets
Field scale vegetables, arable, fruit, equine. Field scale vegetables is still a large employer in the area, and a significant employer of ethnic minorities in the Medway towns.
Great contrasts between the extensive livestock grazing on the marshes and vegetable production such as salad onions with 3-4 crops a year; between a traditional and fairly constant way of life, and growing high value potentially high profit crops but needing a lot of work and dealing with markets. Some vegetable land needs irrigation. Those wanting an easier way of life or nearing retirement, go to arable cropping or letting for horses.
The supermarkets are the major market and have a powerful role, for example their quality standards have led to less on farm packing with more going to centralised big packhouses such as at Southfleet.

Business confidence level
Most farms in the area do well from what they do. It has been a survival of the fittest (15 years ago the NFU membership represented 130 farming businesses); those that are left take on the land of those leaving, farm on a bigger scale and to a high standard. The call to double food production is a positive one for farmers, and demand for local food and less food miles is an opportunity to promote produce from the area. There is a huge contrast between the intensively farmed grade 1 land and the marshes that often lie adjacent, these have more in common with the hill farming areas of Britain than lowland farming.

Engagement in agri-environment schemes
Those that farm the marshes have put a lot of effort into maintaining them and feel proud of conserving them. An interest in conservation has often gone together with or followed from an interest in wildfowling (a big activity in the area) and for some the passion for conservation has then become the main motivation. Agri-environment schemes have no conflct with wildfowling interests, but they can do with public access.

Trends towards or away from types of production in the area
Economics decides production, so everything depends on this. A fairly stable pattern, with field scale vegetables on the best land, livestock on the marshes. Formerly there was more fruit growing, and more potatoes. Horses have become significant enterprises, with liveries and horse paddocks. The ESA has turned a lot of the marshes back from arable to grassland. The last 2 dairy farms in the area, at Cliffe and Hoo have gone in the last 15 years. Other livestock such as pigs are in very small numbers.

LA engagement / consultation with farmers
Farmers have very little time for meetings (Rochester is the only Kent branch that still has a monthly meeting) and do not have the staff that would have once allowed them to take time off the farm. Horticulture may be an exception in that relatively large numbers of people are employed, but there is a high management demand in these businesses. If LA

are seeking to consult or advertise initiatives, the NFU is happy to act as a first point of contact and as a liaison between them and farmers. Email circulation is a good possibility.